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THE BLACK HILLS JEZEBEL; or, DEADWOOD DICK'S WARD.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, "ROSEBUD ROB" NOVELS, "GILT-EDGED DICK," "BONANZA BILL," ETC., ETC.



"OH! LET ME GO—PLEASE DO," SHE SAID, STRUGGLING TO RELEASE HERSELF. "I—I WAS ONLY TRYING TO STUDY OUT IF YOU WERE NOT—IF YOU WEREN'T DEADWOOD DICK."

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CHAPTER I.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST.

SUNSET was kissing the tops of many a rocky crest and pine forest in the wild Black Hills country—a balmy, glorious August sunset, at that, whose warmth, mingled with the flower perfumed breeze, was grateful to the senses of one whose pathway it illumined. All nature seemed smiling as the day narrowed down toward the embrace of night.

Down on a rough and narrow stage-road, that wound out of the hills toward a lower gulch-river section of country, came one of those ponderous overland wagons known as "prairie schooners," drawn by a pair of oxen, or rather held back by them, for the road was descending, all the way, and in many places dangerously steep.

On the front part of the wagon was a high seat, upon which sat a girl dressed in boy's clothes, from the long-legged patent-leather boots she wore to the jaunty slouch hat which was cocked up on one side of her head, and she it was who cracked a long-lashed whip over the oxen's heads, and her voice rung out with "haw" "gee" and "g'long," arousing musical echoes among the cliffs, that overhung the road.

In form and face this girl was quite prepossessing. Her figure was about the medium height of American women, symmetrical, graceful and well developed, while her face was round, prettily chiseled and browned with exposure to the wind and sun, with laughing blue eyes, and a wealth of light-brown hair worn loosely over her shoulders, that any lady in the land might have envied.

The curtains of the schooner were closed, and the girl driver was the only human to be seen, as the ungainly vehicle rolled along, oftentimes threatening to pitch over the great embankment that descended on the right hand side.

Yet the driver seemed to have no fears of this, and cracked her long-lashed whip merrily.

"G'lang, Buck! Haw, there, Bright. Won't ye never learn to keep in the road? Next to a mule, you're the meanest critter on the face o' the earth, to drive, tho' you have come a good stretch, to-day, an' I allow we'll strike a campin' spot before long. Eh, daddy?—sha'n't we make a halt, purty soon?"

There was a groan from within the covered vehicle; the curtains parted, and a strange-looking head attached to humped shoulders, protruded from within.

A horrible smile came over the hairy face, as he thrust it through the curtains, by the side of his singularly pretty companion.

"Stop?" he demanded, with a shrug of his shoulders. "No! no! Let's press on—press steadily on. Our destination is not many miles away, and we can reach it in time."

"But, not to-night, daddy. We must camp and rest up our royal stud of Arabian chargers, here, or first we know one of 'em will drop, and I'll hev to harness you up with the other ox."

A frown of dissatisfaction crossed the old man's face.

"Well, well—have your own way," he growled, crawling back out of sight. "When you get fresh meat give me mine raw; it whets my appetite for vengeance. Ha! ha! ha!"

And he laughed in a way that was simply frightful to hear.

"Poor father," the girl driver murmured, even her pretty young face growing pained in expression. "Sometimes I believe he is really growing crazy over his trouble; but at other times he appears so rational that no insanity seems lurking in his veins. Ugh! I dread to anticipate the future. There will be trouble, without doubt, and Heaven only knows what will be the result to him, and to me."

Even the sunlight failed to chase the doubtful expression from her features, and the wagon rolled along joltingly down into a narrow gulch between two giant mountains, where the sun's beams never penetrated.

Here were grass and water—a little brooklet fed by a spring that gurgled from the rocks, and a good a camping-place, probably, as could be found for miles around.

Therefore, the girl gave the oxen an order to halt, and they were not slow about obeying, for they had pulled the heavy vehicle up and down the rugged mountain roads, since early morning.

A glance into the wagon apprised her that the hunchback was asleep, so the pretty driver sprang to the ground and unyoked the oxen, and turned them out to graze.

Then, taking a light sporting rifle from the wagon, she set off up the gulch in quest of game. It was not yet dark, but soon would be, as the shadows of evening were beginning to creep into the gulch, and she knew it was necessary to replenish the larder.

Less than half a mile up the gulch she came to a halt. Above her, upon a shelving crag she saw a large buck deer standing in bold relief, gazing down at her as if surprised to see a lone human in this dismal spot.

Quickly she raised her rifle and took aim, but, before she could fire, there came to her hearing the almost simultaneous reports of two other rifles, and she saw the buck lunge forward from the ledge, and come plunging downward into the gulch.

At the same instant two men stepped into view from previous concealment in a clump of shrubbery near where the girl was standing, uttering loud laughs as the buck fell a crushed and bleeding mass in front of them, upon the gulch bottom.

"Scuse us, young feller," one said, with a chuckle, "but we allowed you couldn't hit ther buck, an' so we got in ahead o' you."

"My heyes, Bob—thet ain't no feller," the other hunter allowed, with an insolent stare. "Jest luk at thet figger will ye? It's a gal, in briches!"

Although brave to a fault, the old hunchback's companion felt an instinctive dread of the two men, but she resolved to put on a bold front and not let them know she had any fear of them, whatever.

"Yes—a gal in breeches!" she cried, independently, "an' one who can take care of number one, every day in a week, too! Are you going to divide up that 'er deer with me?"

"Thet depends on circumstances, my purty," the eldest replied, advancing a few paces. "Ef ye don't mind givin' us a smack apiece from your purty mouth, I allow we'll dress ther buck an' carry the two best quarters hum for you."

"If you come any nearer, I'll give ye a smack in the jaw with the butt of my rifle, you big loafer," the girl cried, sharply, holding that instrument ready for use. "You'll find you've picked up the wrong 'possum to grant sech little favors. And the sooner you set to work and skin that buck, the less likely my fingers will accidentally pull the trigger of my rifle, the result of which would be death to both of you. Oh! I've got the drop, so go to work, as I ordered."

The two roughs gazed at each other in astonishment.

The idea of their being forced to bow to the will of this chit of a girl was equally preposterous and amusing, and they laughed outright. Nevertheless, there was no disputing the fact that she had the drop on them, and there was a certain composure in the expression of her pretty face, and a gleam in her eyes the spoke better than words that she meant business.

Both men were burly, brawny fellows, and looked able to handle a dozen like their girl captor, single-handed, which made the situation extremely novel.

The elder of the twain was a man of about forty years, and wore a heavy black beard that swept nearly to his belt, and black hair to match, making him, together with his semi-Mexican dress and plumed sombrero a most brigandish-looking person. He was armed with a rifle and a pair of revolvers.

His companion was about thirty, wore a heavy black mustache, and was dressed in the same style.

"Well, cuss my boots!" the elder ruffian cried, taking another survey of the situation—"d'ye think, gal, thet a pair of thoroughbreds, like us, is a-goin' ter knuckle under ter sech a critter as you? Why, we're a couple of dynamite torpedoes, we are, an' likely ter explode any minute, with outraged dignity, an' blow ye ter atoms. I'm Bloody Bill, an' my companion hyar is Black Bob, ye see!"

"I don't care for that; if you're both as black and bloody as the Old Nick himself, you can't scare me. I'm full of grit, and when I set out to have my way, I'm bound to have it. So go ahead now, and skin that buck before the last ray of sunlight disappears from the crest of

yonder peak, or I'm hanged if I don't start a cemetery right here."

The roughs exchanged glances, and of one accord drew their hunting-knives.

"I reckon we might as well be obligin' to the young lady, Bill," Black Bob remarked, "fer thar's no tellin' but we may make a mash. So come on, an' we'll skin the deer quicker'n lightning."

They accordingly set briskly to work, and their young captor stood coolly watching them, ready to balk any treacherous design they might have in view.

They were aware of the fact, and therefore chose the wisest course—that of respectful word and demeanor.

"You're rough on two honest disposed fellows, you aire," Bloody Bill growled. "Why, we belong to the church, we do, an' aire two o' the nicest pilgrims in ther mountains."

"When you're kept muzzled," was the sarcastic response. "Come! you'd better be lively. The sun is most off the peak."

"And the hide is all off the deer. Tell us, now, 'fore we quarter 'im—what's yer name, gal?"

"Kit, fer short—Kentucky Kit, fer long, 'cause I originally sprouted down in old Kentucky!" was the reply, "an' ye recollect thar's sum good nerve an' a few good card-players down in the Blue-grass State."

The two men exchanged glances again—this time of a startled nature—and Black Bob said, in an undertone:

"Our game, sure enough. We'll not follow boldly."

Bloody Bill nodded; then they set to work quartering up the buck.

"What were those roughs saying then?" was the thought of Kentucky Kit. "I allow they were planning some mischief. But they'll have to wake up earlier to get the best of me."

The deer was soon quartered, and then Black Bob turned to her, and doffed his hat, gallantly.

"There you are, miss. You're at liberty ter shoulder what ye want, and trot home. We'll naturally, out of pure gallantry, accept what remains. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Ah! indeed! But, don't be so gallant as to overlook my immediate necessities. I want you each to shoulder a quarter and carry it to my camp for me—then I shall have done with you."

"I'll be cussed fer a skunk if we will!" Bloody Bill replied, growing enraged.

"And I'll be fricasseed if you don't you'll never have any appetite for what's left of that deer!" Kit cried, emphatically. "Come, now, I'll shoot you as quick as to look at you, if you don't mind; so shoulder arms and march along!"

Of two evils they chose the lesser and the girl guide brought up the rear, with her rifle ready for use.

She could not, of course, foresee the denouement of this adventure, but she was determined to hold the victorious hand as long as she could, anyhow.

When they arrived at the camp she directed them where to lay the haunches, after which she announced:

"There—I'll excuse you now, and will advise you not to come fooling around me again, for fear you may get hurt, the next time. Go!" and she pointed down the gulch, whence they had come.

Without a word they obeyed, nor did they halt or speak until they reached the spot where they had left the fore-quarters of the deer.

Here they paused, and confronted each other, looking the disgust they felt for themselves.

"Well, who'd 'a' thought it?" the older ruffian grunted.

"For heaven's sake don't never let the cat out o' the bag," Black Bob replied. "But, we're in luck all the same!"

"You think it's really our game? The name Kate was in our instructions you know—Kit and Kate mean the same."

"But, whar's the old 'un?"

"In the 'schooner,' likely."

"Well, in case we're right, now's our time fer a picnic. A hundred apiece ain't picked up along every trail. But et's a pity about the gal. She's a mighty marriageable piece, an' as purty an' primp as a goose-quill."

"Pshaw! She's got too much boss in her fer me! Conscience an' business don't jibe, an' we must do the job up slick an' clean."

"I'm agreeable ter that, but, how shall we lay fer 'em? The gal smells a mice already, and she'll be as wide awake as a mice, too."

"Oh! we'll wait till morning is purty nigh at hand, an' they're fast asleep."

"What then—knife 'em?"

"No. No music on this occasion!"

"How, then, will you work it?"

"Easy enough. Rub a little o' the combined arsenic and cocculus indicus we use fer traps, on their meat, and they'll never know what hit 'em!"

"Good. We'll have a drink, and then get ready."

They each took a drink from a pocket flask the younger man had; then a fire was built and sufficient of the meat roasted to satisfy their appetites.

They then emptied their flasks of liquor, buckled on their weapons, and laid down for a nap.

It was a very dark night, and they had no fear of discovery.

It was past midnight when they awakened, and without a word crept stealthily away through the darkness on their deadly mission.

CHAPTER II.

NED HARRIS.

By the time they reached the vicinity of the emigrants' camp, the dawn of another day was not far distant, and the intense darkness of the night was rapidly lessening—so much so, in fact, that Black Bob uttered a growl.

"A feller is liable to get his head blowed off, by trying the game, now," he muttered, "and I don't fancy that."

"Pshaw! you are wild. Come along; they're all asleep," the older ruffian replied, boldly. "I've got the stuff all prepared in a bottle, and all that remains to be done is to rub it well over those parts of the meat they are likely to eat first. Then we can go off and collect our revenue stamps. Ha! ha!—pretty good, that—revenue stamps, eh?"

"The joke be hanged. I'd rather have the stamps themselves."

"Then come along and earn them. Look! I can already see the two quarters hung to the limb of a tree near the wagon. Flat, now, and as snaky as possible! If we're discovered—then we must use our tools fer all they're worth."

Throwing themselves flat upon their faces, they crawled stealthily along toward the limb which supported the two haunches of deer-meat, being their destination.

Worm-fashion they wriggled along, without so much as a variation from their course, or a pause.

At last without discovery, they reached the tree, and rose to their feet. All was gloomy and silent about the lone voyageurs' camp, not so much as a cricket's chirp being heard to break the monotony.

"They are all as fast asleep as can be, an' we could enter the wagon and knife 'em, for that matter," Bloody Bill said, huskily, "but we'll spare bloodshed, while we may. Draw yer pop-guns, now, and keep a sharp eye out for danger, while I swash the meat."

Black Bob obeyed; then taking a bottle of liquid from his pocket, his confederate poured some of the contents out in his hands, and rubbed it upon the haunches of the deer, continuing this operation until he had exhausted all the deadly poison the flask contained.

"There! If they feast on that beefsteak, tomorrow morning, or rather this morning, they'll soon make food for the wolves," he muttered, with a shuddering laugh.

"But, if they don't—if they should turn up, again?"

"Bah! what care we, after we get the rhino fer the job? Her nibs never 'll dare squeal, lest she gives herself away, and that's where we've got her, you see. Come, let's make fer Placerville, at once, and get our duxes."

"I never care for mine!" the other said, with satire.

The sun had climbed well up the horizon the next morning, when Kentucky Kit arose from her pile of blankets within the wagon, and parting the curtains, jumped out upon the ground, feeling greatly refreshed from her night's repose.

The instant after, however, she uttered an exclamation of surprise, for there, in front of the wagon, a horse lay upon the ground, and a young man lay with his head pillowed against the animal's glossy side. Both were apparently fast asleep, and formed as they lay there with the early morning sunlight streaming down upon them, a picture well worthy of an artist's brush.

Even the span of oxen had drawn up in the vicinity, and stood gazing upon the scene in apparent curiosity.

"Well, well, if this don't beat my time, I'm off!" Kentucky Kit observed, thrusting her

hand in her breeches pocket, and taking a survey of the scene. "I wonder who the pilgrim is? At all events, he's a darling looker, right from Daisy gulch."

And, in truth, the stranger did present rather a prepossessing appearance, as he lay stretched out upon the ground in a position of natural grace.

He was possessed of a symmetrical form, noticeable for its prominent muscular development, and in face was rather handsome of feature, with a prominent mustache, a firm but pleasant mouth, denoting resolution and will, and hair long and wavy. His eyes were closed in slumber, so that none of their beauty could be determined.

Kentucky Kit, with all a girl's innate curiosity, stood for several minutes regarding him with an admiring gaze.

"He's just the purtiest feller I've seen yet, since comin' inter the hills," she observed. "I'll bet he's a reg'lar 'masher,' too, as they say out East. Anyhow, it wouldn't take long for him to 'mash' me, if he's as good as he looks. I wonder—"

She hesitated, and blushed prettily; then a dare-devil gleam shot into her eyes, and creeping forward, she bent over and kissed the sleeping man on the lips; then darted back hastily, calling:

"Daddy! daddy! quick—there's a man in camp!"

Her cries were answered by the instant appearance of the queer old delegate's head through the slit in the canvas, speedily followed by his body.

In another instant, he was out upon the ground beside Kit, an almost repulsive-looking dwarf, not over four feet in height, yet massively proportioned for his size.

"Well, what's the matter?" he snarled, glaring at the sleeper. "Who is this chap, child?"

"That I do not know," Kit replied. "Some stranger, probably, who, running upon our camp, concluded to accept its protection in order to get a few hours' sleep."

"You are a good guesser, young lady," the stranger said, opening a pair of magnetic black eyes, and rising to a sitting posture, "for such is the case, and I hope I have not intruded."

"If a friend you are, then welcome you are; if an enemy, you might better have cut off your wind ere you came here!" the dwarf said, sternly.

"Oh! of course he is a friend, daddy," Kentucky Kit declared, her pretty face suffused with blushes, for she now believed the handsome stranger had only been feigning sleep at the time of her stolen kiss. "You see, we are two lone voyageurs, on our way to Placerville," she explained, "and we naturally expect of course to find an enemy lurking behind every bush, in so wild a region."

"Then you can set aside all fears, as far as I am concerned," was the reply, "for I am no bugbear to harm those who keep out of my pie. By the way, I am also en route for Placerville, wherever it may be, and, if permissible I will join forces, and your defensive condition will be slightly bettered, thereby."

"You have a bold, unwavering eye, young man, and I reckon I can trust you, though you are the first I have placed confidence in, for many a year. What is your name, young man?"

"Ned Harris, free ranger, at your service, uncle; and now, may I in return inquire your name?"

"Yes, young man. It's a proud old name, too, is the name of mine, tho' terribly sinned against. Girard Athol, was the name I used to bear, and the Athols were one of the finest families in old Kentucky. But o' late years, since I've grown older and uglier, an' more like a beast than a human, the name of Old Scavenger has been given me. My daughter, here, and the only faithful friend I've known, of late years, is Kate Athol, or Kentucky Kit as I call her, because she's a blue grass widow," and here the little old man shook all over with suppressed laughter at what he evidently considered a good joke.

While Kentucky Kit colored, painfully, and said, reprovingly:

"Father!"

"Oh! git out," Old Scavenger chuckled, "I know you've got an eye sot on our friend here, but it ain't goin' ter work. You're a straight out-an'-out grass, an' ye better play yer keeds ruther keerful."

"Oh! don't mind what he says, please,—he's such a terrible tease!" Kit protested, turning to Harris, half between a laugh and a cry—and from that moment, the young man realized that

the young beauty had a secret under all her bright and smiling exterior. "Make yourself at home, and I will prepare some breakfast."

"Not out of that deer-meat, if you please," Ned warned. "That is not exactly healthy."

"Not healthy!" both Kit and Old Scavenger exclaimed in surprise.

"Exactly. That meat is poisoned. The two men with whom Miss Kitty had such a remarkable encounter last evening, came back in the dead of night, and washed both haunches with poison!"

Old Scavenger was greatly affected by this intelligence, for he sunk back upon a seat on a log, and his eyes became riveted upon the ground, while his hands clinched, tightly.

"I see! I see!" he muttered, huskily.

"They were lying in wait, no doubt, when Kit run upon them. Ah! everything is plain to me, now. I am upon the right trail, and by some unaccountable reason, I am expected!"

His fierce features seemed to grow even more terrible in their expression, and his wild eyes raised and glared at Harris, fiercely.

"You saw these men do this?" he asked.

"I first overheard their plot, and then saw them fulfill it. They were, I should judge, sent here by some other person, for they spoke of collecting pay."

"Yes, they were sent here for another purpose than that which would be Christian," the old man responded; "they were sent on to murder us. Young man, would you care to hear a strange story of a wrong, from the lips of a wretched old wreck of humanity like I am?"

"Certainly, I would, old pard, and if it is in my power to give you any assistance to right that wrong, all you have to do is call on me."

"Thankee, boy—thankee! I see you have the true man about you. So I will tell you my story. Et ain't a very purty story, like ye read in story papers, nor et ain't never been writ wi' a gilt-edge pen, fer et's true from life—a bitter life."

"Ye see, I was born of a proud old Kentucky family, noted fer beauty, wealth and accomplishments, thet go to make up aristocracy, an' when I came into the world a little ugly misshapen customer, it was a sorry day for my family pride and fer myself. What an eyesore I was to my sisters and brothers I never fully realized till I grewed up to the age when I should have been a man in size; then I began to see how matters stood, and one day I turned up missing; I forever left my home, resolved no longer to be a stumbling-block in the way of my family's pride."

I came into the West, and roamed wild in the forest and mountains among the beasts and red-skins, who never harmed me from a superstition that I was in league with the Evil One. Thus years rolled by, until one day, in a lonely mountain gorge I struck gold, and there for two years I toiled, alone and lonely. At last having amassed a large fortune of the shinin' stuff, I buried it, and went forth into the more civilized regions.

There I met a beautiful woman—a scheming adventuress I should say—who on short acquaintance professed to admire me. Ha! ha! fancy a woman loving such a nondescript as I!

"In a weak moment I revealed the secret of my wealth, and from that time on she haunted me ever, until, blinded by her professed ardent devotion, I married her, and we set out for my lonely mountain home."

"Here, for two years, I think I was happy, for in that time, and up to the last day I ever saw her, she was kind and loving to me, though I often wondered why it was, and suspected it was from a desire to get my gold. Therefore I never revealed its hiding-place to her."

"A little one was born to us, the year after our marriage, and God had spared it my deformity. You see her, there, now, sir, as brave and noble a little girl as there is in the land. But for her, I should have long ere this put an end to my miserable existence; for her sake I lived on—and for vengeance!"

"Just two years after our marriage the woman came up missing, together with my buried fortune, which she had in some way discovered, when I believed its hiding-place a secret to her. She never returned and I have not seen her since. I did not pursue her, for I had my babe to watch over and protect. But, I swore an oath of vengeance, some day to be fulfilled, and I am on that vengeful mission, now."

"I remained in the gulch and mined a little, for years. I accumulated more gold, and finally with Kit, I went back to Kentucky, and put her out to school, while I went into the interior of the State, built me a hut in the moun-

tains, and lived there in utter seclusion. My child came to see me often, and it gave me great satisfaction to see that education and refined associations did not turn her affections from me; she was my pride, my idol and my all in life.

"At last, about a year ago, I saw that my money was nearly gone, so I told my child the story of her mother, and asked her advice. Her answer came quick and decisive as I felt sure it would, for her spirit was my spirit. She said: 'Daddy, let's hunt her down, and make her give back the gold, or enough of it to support you in your old age.'

"And so we set out for the West, and have been searching ever since. It was about a month ago that I first obtained any trace of her. I went into a photograph gallery, and saw her picture, which I at once recognized, on exhibition in a show-case. 'That lady?' says the artist, in answer to my inquiry—'why, that is Madam Cheviot, of Placerville, a little mining burg, up in the hills. Well 'heeled' they say, and styles out like a queen. Goin' to marry Darrel, the bonanza king, too, I've heard.' 'Never!' I said, under my breath; then I bought the picture, and set out for Placerville, whither I am now bound. So there you have the part of my story, Harris, which has come to pass; what the denouement will be I do not know. It only remains for the hand of time to determine that."

CHAPTER III.

HARRIS ASSUMES A CHARGE.

"AND a very interesting little story it is," Harris responded, lighting a cigar as the old man finished. "Were I a novelist or an actor, I should utilize the incidents. The woman probably had got an inkling of your wealth, and only married you, to get possession of it."

"That is all. She deceived me, and I know, now, that she is a crafty, scheming adventuress. And if I am in time, I shall endeavor to prevent her insinuating another victim into her trap."

"She evidently knows of your coming."

"She may have had spies on my track since I left Kentucky, or, it is possible that the picture I saw in Cheyenne was but a decoy, and the artist her agent. Since last night's occurrences, and that which you have so luckily exposed, this morning, I believe that, fearing my coming, she contemplates a hasty marriage with the rich mine-owner. This must not be. While I live, she can never trick other men as she did me. Therefore she must be circumvented, which necessitates that I should be on the watch and ready. Harris, I believe you are a man of good principles, integrity and honor, and I want to ask a favor of you."

"Ask it, sir, and I doubt not I shall find it in my power to grant it," was the reply.

"Very well. It is this: I want you to loan me your horse, and as security, take my team and wagon here. I also want you to take charge of my daughter, and protect her as you would a sister, until I return. If I should never return, take her as your ward, until she sees fit to marry. If I don't return, or you don't see me again, institute a search for me, for I shall not be dead, but a prisoner in her power. Will you do this for me, Harris?"

"With pleasure, my old friend. I am only glad of the chance to espouse the good cause of yourself and daughter, I assure you. What movements shall we make, during your absence?"

"Journey on to Placerville, and get some kind of a habitation. If you are beset by tools of the Tigress, use your own judgment in dealing with them. As soon as I see a chance, I will report."

And so it was arranged.

Dick was to take charge of Kentucky Kit, and Old Scavenger was to go on to Placerville in advance.

After a breakfast on jerked venison and coffee, some of which Dick had in his saddle-bags, Old Athol set forth.

"Take good care of my child, Harris," was his last injunction, as he rode away, "for she is all that I have in life to worship."

"Never fear for her safety," was the reply; then the little old man galloped away around the bend, on his strong-limbed steed, and Harris and his pretty charge were left alone.

"Oh! I am so fearful some harm will come to him," the girl said, tears starting into her pretty eyes. "He has been a dear good father to me, if he is deformed and homely."

"A homely bud often opens into the sweetest flower, you know," Dick suggested. "But, you needn't have fears for the old gent, for he's far shrewder than he appears. It will

be a cloudy day when he gets out of his reckoning."

"You like him, then?"

"I like his spirit, and his—daughter! Ha! ha! what an impulsive little kiss that was you gave me, to be sure, and how I enjoyed it!"

The girl colored, and turned hastily toward the wagon.

"Oh! you are just mean," she said. "You might know I didn't mean it. I thought—I thought—I—I—"

"Who did you think it was?"

"I—I—oh! I don't know what. I thought I'd wake you, and see how surprised you'd be; so, don't let's talk any more about it."

"All right. I'll forgive you this time, and the next time, too, maybe. Shall we make a start now?"

"Yes, for I want to get to Placerville, if possible, to-day."

"I don't think it will be possible. It is a long distance through the mountains yet. Still, it may not be as far as I anticipate."

The oxen were yoked up and hitched to the wagon—then Kentucky Kit assumed her old position of driver, while Harris walked ahead, rifle in hand.

During the forenoon he brought down a young buck deer, and put it aboard the wagon, but that was the only incident to mar the monotony of the journey. At noon they halted about an hour for rest and food, and Harris soon cut a couple of fine steaks from the deer, which Kit roasted in a skillful manner.

After an hour's tarry, they journeyed on again through the winding gulch with its babbling creek, and at sunset, seeing no signs of their destination, made a halt in a place that nature had seemingly fashioned out for a camping spot.

On both sides rose mighty ledges hundreds of feet in height, while the gulch bottom was perfectly level, and carpeted with fresh and tender grass. Flowers bloomed on either hand, emitting a soothing fragrance; the creek gurgled musically through its little time-worn channel; a bracing breeze laden with forest perfumes blew down from the mountains, and all nature seemed serenely welcoming the close of day.

After supper, when the soft haze of gloom was beginning to gather around, Harris lit his pipe—a quaint affair of ancient pattern,—and lay back upon the ground against a grassy mound, watching, ostensibly, the rings of smoke that curled up toward the first stars of evening, which began to appear over the crest of the rocks far above, but in reality watching Kentucky Kit who had procured a little rocking chair from the wagon and seated herself, with a book in hand near the light of the night fire.

But, instead of reading, she was gazing thoughtfully down the gulch toward Placerville—dreamily, as if some pleasant memory was before her mind.

"A penny for your thoughts, Princess Pretty," Harris said, laughingly, as he nimbly tossed a copper over into her hat, which lay on the ground beside her. "Wert thou thinking of some noble Romeo, whom thou hast left in far and distant lands?"

She broke out into a peculiar little laugh, at that.

"Oh, no," she replied. "I abhor Shakespeare, and consequently detest Romeos. Take a man who spends more than half his time before a mirror, and all of his income on dress, and learns to talk love from a dictionary, and you have your Romeo. Bah! I wouldn't give that"—and she snapped her thumb, contemptuously—"for a car-load of such cattle! Do you know who I was thinking of?"

"I haven't the slightest idea, unless it was of your father."

"No. I was thinking of a man—an awful, awful man, whom I have heard of at nearly every trading-post, and mining-town this side of the Missouri. Oh he's a terrible fellow, according to all report. And who do you suppose I was just comparing him to, in appearance?"

"Well, I don't know—poor me, perhaps."

"Yes, exactly; you!"

"Well, I don't know whether to take that as a compliment, or not? Who is this terrible individual, may I ask?"

"Oh, he's a brave, fearless, reckless Bedouin of the West, whom people fear and fight, and yet he fears them not. He is handsome, and courteous to friends, and willing to be friends to all who deal square and honest. It was in Cheyenne I first heard a young woman telling of him, and I fell in love with him, on the spot, and formed an ideal of him, in my imagination."

"And I am a duplicate of the ideal, eh?"

"Rather so, only my awful man gets awfully stern and morose, when crossed, my informant told me."

"You never saw me mad, yet; I'm a very thundercloud when I get mad—thunder, lightning and all!" Harris laughingly averred.

"Well, that's the way my ideal is, and he's just to my fancy. Indeed I think I really love him, just because other people turn against him."

"But you have not yet disclosed the name of this lucky dog who has been so fortunate as to inherit your affection, without ever seeing you."

"I don't know what his real name is, but he is called Deadwood Dick!"

"What! the noted outlaw?"

"The same! Outlaw though he is, they say he is ever kind and courteous to unprotected women, and that's more than you can say of a third of the men of the world at large."

"Very true. But, you may have formed an erroneous idea of this bold desperado. It would be silly for a young lady like you to cherish even a single thought of such a wretch as he."

"He ain't a wretch!" she cried, impetuously, "and you needn't say he is, for I wouldn't believe you. I guess I ought to know, when Calamity Jane told me all about him. She said they were about as good as promised to get married, when they dissolved, by mutual consent, and went different ways. Oh! you bet he's a 'screamer' as they say up here in the hills, and the first time I see him I'm going to get married to him—that is, if he is willing."

"Pshaw! he's been married half a dozen times already, and always lost his wife one way or another, shortly after. Take my advice, Miss Kitty, and fight shy of him, and never cast a single foolish thought on him."

"Your advice is all right in its place, Mr. Harris, but it can never change my views in this matter. Do you think we will get to Placerville to-morrow?"

"I do. It cannot be over a matter of ten miles away, now."

The conversation changed onto different topics from that on, and finally subsided altogether, Kit retiring to the wagon, as Harris had expressed his intention of sleeping literally with one eye open, in anticipation of the return of the prowlers of the previous night.

But it was not long ere he was sleeping as soundly as his pretty ward, as he lay rolled in his blanket upon the grass. He had walked all day, hence the weariness that put him to sleep.

How long he had slept he knew not, but he finally awoke to consciousness and opened his eyes.

The moon's bright light was streaming down into the gulch, and—Kentucky Kit was kneeling by his side, and gazing earnestly into his face.

She started violently, as he opened his eyes, and discovered her.

"Forgive me," she murmured, in a frightened tone—then attempted to arise and escape, but Harris sat up, and caught her by the wrist.

"Hold on," he said, gently. "Don't be afraid. What were you looking at—my beautiful phiz?" with a smile.

"Oh! let me go—please do," she said, struggling to release herself. "I—I was only trying to study out if you were not—if you weren't Deadwood Dick."

"Oh! that's it, eh? Then you had a suspicion that I might be the outlaw, eh?"

"Yes, sir." She was trembling like a leaf as she spoke.

"Then dismiss that belief, my child," he said, kindly, "and go back to your rest."

"I—I was so afraid you were him, and would think me bold. I am very glad you are not," she said, falteringly, and tears were standing in her eyes, when she turned and left.

"The tears belied her words then," Harris mused, as he gazed after her. "I wonder if she does really love this fellow, of whom I am the counterpart? First I know she will be loving Ned Harris, and that will settle my hash. She is warm and impulsive, like all Southern women, and wouldn't make a fellow a bad ornament for his humble ten-by-twelve, that is, if a fellow was inclined to annex a Mrs. to his establishment, which I am not, or, at least—that is—well, I should have to think the matter over, a deal."

He had the remainder of the night to meditate on the subject, for he did not again go to sleep, but what decision he may or may not have arrived at, we will leave for the future chapters of this romance to develop.

Kentucky Kit made her reappearance at day—

break, and there were traces of tears upon her face. But, after bathing that pretty face in the waters of the brook she looked as fresh and rosy as a peach. A meal was soon prepared and dispatched, interspersed with a little desultory conversation; then preparations were made to continue the journey.

They were about ready to start, when they saw a person approaching on foot over the back trail—and a woman at that!

"Oh! let's wait, and see who it is," Kit pleaded eagerly, and they accordingly did wait, for Harris thought best to humor his new charge as much as possible.

The approaching craft was a short party, and very fat at that—in fact, extraordinarily fat, resembling a hoghead mounted on a pair of stubby legs, with a round ball on top as an ornament.

And the worst of it was, this fleshy fairy who was floating so gracefully westward *ho!* was a negress. The nearer she came the more closely the two inspected her.

She certainly was an odd-looking creature, being so "off" the usual proportions of humanity, with a pair of thick red lips, and big eyes, the whites of which rolled about in a decidedly wicked manner. Her head was ornamented with an old-fashioned straw bonnet with a wide front, and her obese figure was incased in a dirty-looking gown not reaching to her feet, which were protected by an enormous pair of shoes.

A bit of shawl pinned about her shoulders and a belt around her ample waist completed her costume, except the weapons in her belt, which consisted of a pair of cavalry pistols, a large, keen-edged knife, a large razor, and a tomahawk, which was nothing more or less than a butcher's cleaver.

With a truly business-like stride, this black wayfarer approached where Harris and Kit were standing, puffing and blowing like a wind-broken horse, and rolling the whites of her eyes, ludicrously.

"See hyer, you chil'ren!" she said, halting before them, and unfolding a wood-cut picture of a jolly Dutchman, such as is used by theaters for bulletin-board advertising, "hab you seen nuffin' of sech a pussin passing this way?"

"I reckon not, aunty," Harris replied.

"Is it some person you're after?"

"De good lor' bress ye, yes. Dat's my truant husband, Hans Schartzeneimer, dat is—de unfaithful monster. Chile, did you ebber hear tole ob Romeo an' Juliet? Well, sah! if you lub dat romance, you will at least pity me, for I am a Juliet, widout my Romeo. We met in de dead ob night, an' war j'ined by de parson in de ban's ob wedlock, but when my husband dis-kibbered dat sis maiden was a chile ob de colored race, he swore a awful swore, an' dat's de last I've ebber see'd ob him. Oh! tell me, honey, hab you not see'd my wandering Romeo?"

CHAPTER IV.

A CASE IN WHICH EYES WERE TRUMPS!

"I HAVE not, beauty!" Harris replied, dryly. "Why do you come to this wild region to seek him, when probably he is luxuriating in the East?"

The negress did not reply, but strode abruptly on up the gulch, and soon disappeared around the first bend.

After she had gone, Harris took off his hat and scratched his head.

"Well, what do you think of her?" Kentucky Kit asked, watching him.

"I think of all the menageries I ever saw, that was the most elephantine," was the reply. "If that museum is in Placerville when we arrive there, I must cultivate its acquaintance."

"Why?"

"Because, if that is a genuine negress I'm much mistaken. I fancy the black will wash."

"In that case, why the disguise?"

"That remains to be learned. Disguises are utilized for various purposes you are doubtless aware. Come! let's be moving on."

He took the lead, with his rifle lying across the hollow of his left arm; Kit mounted the wagon, and drove the oxen.

An hour after midday they passed up the main street into the mining town of Placerville—one of the liveliest camps since the palmy days of Deadwood.

It was built in the gulch-bottom which was at this point about a half-mile wide, and comprised some hundred and fifty shanties and cabins, with three or four better finished and more pretentious residences.

The main and only street was built up entirely with business places, back of which on either hand were scattered the habitations. There

were three or four of miscellaneous stores, a dozen saloons and dance-halls combined, a blacksmithy, a barn-like edifice designated as a church, and a hotel, where the transient patronage usually found accommodation.

Before this latter Kentucky Kit stopped, and left the oxen to quench their thirst at a watering trough, while she consulted with Harris.

"I will make a few inquiries and learn if there are any empty shanties to be had, he said, "and if there are not, will rent a tent, until we can do better."

He therefore left Kit at the wagon, having little doubt but what she could take care of herself, and walked up the street for a reconnaissance.

After a few inquiries he learned of a snug little shanty, and succeeded in renting it.

On his return to communicate the good news to Kit, he passed a respectable looking shanty with a store front, and blinds on the inside. It was evidently an office, and tacked to the door was a placard bearing the notice:

"WANTED—A CLERK."

Harris paused a few minutes, and deliberated—then entered the place, resolved to make an application for the position.

It proved to be a banker or broker's office, divided about the center by a long counter, guarded by a stout wire grating from counter to ceiling. There was, however, an aperture of considerable size in the middle, through which business was transacted.

A dandily attired young man of graceful figure, and prepossessing countenance, wearing a model blonde mustache, stood before the aperture, as Harris entered, conversing with an elderly gentleman behind the counter, who was dressed in black broadcloth, with an immaculate collar, white tie, and glossy shirt front, a stern-faced, unbearded party, whose face was not the most handsome with its plenitude of furrows and wrinkles, and whose hair was as white as a drift of prairie snow.

"No, Mr. Randall, I don't think you will answer my purpose," the elderly gentleman was saying. "Young men who pass the night as late as two A. M., in gambling and drinking, are in my opinion scarcely fitted for my service."

"I am sorry such a terribly unjust rumor should have reached you," Randall replied, "and it seems to me that Madame Cheviot's recommendation ought to bear weight with you in my behalf."

"But it does not, a pin's worth. Were I enamored of the moneyed madam, it might, but as I am not, I must needs refer you to my neighbor banker. Be kind enough to allow the other gentleman your position."

Randall stepped back, and gave a scowl at Harris, who assumed his position.

"Do you apply for the position, sir?" the broker asked, surveying the man well.

"I came in for that purpose, yes."

"What is your name?"

"Edward Harris."

"A stranger here?"

"Just arrived, not an hour ago."

"What business have you followed?"

"My life has been a roving one, principally, but I am versed somewhat in 'most everything."

"Can you write short-hand?"

"Quite readily."

"Can you send and receive messages by telegraph?"

"I can, though not as rapidly as some."

"Fast operators often make mistakes. Are you familiar with the mining business and mines of the West?"

"I have visited nearly every mining district of importance, and have some ideas of my own concerning them."

"Good! Can you keep books?"

"I can."

"Well, sir, my clerk must necessarily be able to do my business as though I were here to dictate to him. I am often absent, and I want a man who can be trusted implicitly, as he often has the handling of a small mint of money. I am favorably impressed with you, but shall have to deliberate before engaging you. Now for instance, if I were absent, and a chance were tendered you to purchase stocks in the Thunderbolt mine, at Custer, what would you pay?"

"Not a cent. There is no such mine as the Thunderbolt, at least no such incorporated company."

The broker smiled.

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure, unless it has sprung into existence within a few days."

"Well, you are right. That was a little

tester I gave you, you see. How about the little Pittsburg, at Leadville? What's her stocks worth to you?"

"If I were going to purchase, I should not feel safe to pay over thirty-five cents on a dollar, or less."

"You have excellent judgment, I see. How about the Rocket, at Oro City?"

"At par value, every day in a week, and scarce at that."

"True. How comes it you are so well posted, Mr. Harris?"

"My brain, eyes and ears were given to me to use, and I always exercise the trio in conjunction, never trusting the decision of the one without the assent of the other."

"A happy notion for a shrewd man to have. Well, sir, call around this evening. My daughter, who is a keen reader of human nature and character, will be here, and if she approves of you, then you can begin duties to-morrow, at a salary of five thousand a year."

"Thank you," Harris said, modestly.

Then he left the office, and returned to where he had left Kentucky Kit.

"I admire your choice, Mr. Raymond," Randall sneered, after Harris was gone. "I trust for the good of your finances, that Miss Milly will see differently."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean that I believe that man to be a skilled scoundrel, and hope to be able to prove it to you, before he succeeds in causing your financial ruin."

After apprising Kit of his luck in securing a house, Harris also told her of his probable good fortune.

Then the wagon was driven around to the shanty, and the oxen turned loose to graze, while Harris unloaded such furniture and furnishings as the wagon contained, and moved them into the new abode, where Kitty set them to rights.

She soon had the place looking cheery and homelike, and everything neat and tidy.

"This will be your room," she said, pointing to a cosy little bedroom. "Mine is the next one, and I sha'n't be a bit afraid, nights, if I know my governor is in the next room."

"Would you be afraid to remain alone, here, nights?" Harris asked, doubtfully.

"Indeed I would. Why?"

"Nothing; only I was just thinking that it would be more proper for me to go to a hotel, nights."

"Oh! no! no! no! I wouldn't stay here alone for the world. People won't pay any attention to us, or if they do, I am sure they needn't know what relation we bear to each other—they won't know but what we are brother and sister—or, still better, man and wife. What a joke that would be!"

Harris's spirit fairly groaned within him. Man and wife, indeed!

Things were beginning to assume altogether a different aspect from what they had when he had assumed his charge.

Were he to take up his home at the shanty, he felt sure gossip would not be long in linking his name with his pretty *protegee's* in an unfavorable light, which might be the means of causing difficulty with the broker, and other trouble, all around.

Yet he had promised to protect and care for the girl, and he resolved to do it, though he should stand in momentary dread of the results of his remaining under the same roof with her.

There were several things that he was quite sure of. He was satisfied that she liked him, because he was her ideal of this man Deadwood Dick, whom she had never seen—he knew that she was warm and impulsive by nature and thought no harm in expressing her likes and dislikes. He was also equally positive that she was good, and innocent, and therefore calculated no possible harm in his remaining under the same roof with her.

After supper that evening he paid another visit to the broker's office, as had been requested.

The broker was seated before the counter, this time, in company with a young lady, whom he introduced as his daughter, Miss Millicent Raymond, on Harris's entrance.

"This is the young gentleman I was speaking of, dear," the broker said, smilingly; "so give me your estimate of him."

The young lady composedly turned a pair of magnetic black eyes upon Harris, in a steady stare, which he as composedly returned.

For several minutes neither spoke or moved; then the features of the broker's daughter grew

a trifle set and rigid, and a faint rift of pallor passed over her face.

Harris turned to the broker, with a laugh:

"Well, has your daughter drawn her conclusions yet?" he asked. "It's mighty uncomfortable, this being stared at, so."

"Milly, dear, what ails you?" Mr. Raymond demanded, taking her by the arm. "You act strange."

There was no answer. Millicent sat rigid and white upon her chair.

"My God, what's the matter—she has fainted," the broker cried, excitedly.

"No, stand back and I will bring her to!" Harris said, advancing.

He waved his hand above his head, several times, and in front of her face—then retired to a seat, as she gasped, and the color came back to her cheeks.

"You see, I unthinkingly returned Miss Raymond's stare," Harris explained, and she being sensitive to magnetic influence she unconsciously passed into a semi-trance condition. I think if you question her now she will answer, and in my favor, I trust."

"How is it, Milly dear? What do you think of Mr. Harris?"

"He will answer your purpose well," was the reply, gaspingly. "Papa, I want to go home."

"She will naturally feel dizzy for a short time," Harris explained, in answer to the broker's anxious look. "I will leave you, now. Shall I call to-morrow?"

"At eight o'clock. I will give you a fair trial. Good-evening."

"Good evening," and Harris bowed himself out.

"Treacherous work here," he muttered, as he walked along. "She'd have gone flat against me, if I hadn't put a stop to it—and not of her own accord, either. Some one put her up to it, but who? Ha! I think I suspect the party."

He met her early the next morning on his way to the office. She was mounted upon a pretty little Indian pony, taking a ride, but the moment their eyes met he gave a little motion of his hand, and she rode up to him and drew rein.

"What infernal power is this you hold over me, sir, that I must come or go at your beck and nod?" she demanded, trembling in every muscle.

"It is the power of my eyes, which you dared to brave, last evening—the power of mesmerism, which makes you forever the subject to my will. Do you see?"

"Oh! Heaven help me, then. Why did you do this?"

"Because I saw that you were going to influence your father against me, and not of your own accord, either. Some one put you up to exert your influence against me: tell me who it was?"

"I cannot—will not!" she cried, endeavoring to exert a will of her own. "You have no right to ask me."

"You are wrong. I have the right to ask, and the power to know. You will tell me—you dare not refuse me!"

She looked at him a moment, an expression of horror entering her dark orbs, and a shiver of terror flitting over her person.

"After all it would be no more than right for me to tell you, and it was unwomanly for me to enlist against you. It was Ralph Randall who put me on."

Harris nodded:

"I thought as much," he said. "This Randall is your lover?"

"Y-e-s," falteringly.

"What was his object?"

"To procure your dismissal from my father's employ, so that he might stand more of a chance to fill the position. I was to declare you to be Deadwood Dick, the outlaw, he knowing that my father would believe it, as he has implicit faith in my judgment."

Had a bomb exploded at Harris's feet, he could not have been more astonished, but he succeeded in concealing his surprise from her notice.

"So, that's his game, eh? Well, forewarned is forearmed, and I shall look out for your precious lover, and in the meantime, knowing my power over you, it will be best for you not to attempt any warfare against me."

"But you won't harm Mr. Randall—oh! say that you won't!"

"That depends on how he conducts himself," Harris responded, bowing and walking on toward the office.

CHAPTER V.

ROGUES IN CLOVER.

The first day as broker's clerk passed very busily, between learning the business, and some

writing Ned Harris was given to do. He also became acquainted with a number of the townspeople, and overheard some things that were advantageous.

The general topic of conversation seemed to center upon the approaching marriage of the wealthy speculator of the town, Honorable George Darrel, and Madame Cheviot, who was also wealthy. The combined properties of the two were very extensive, and it was claimed that their union would throw under one control the principal part of the real estate in and about Placerville, including buildings and mining interests.

This marriage was to take place on the morrow, it was announced, at the madame's residence, and all the townspeople had been extended an open invitation to be present, in honor to the occasion.

The uppermost thought in Harris's mind was: would Old Scavenger be there to prevent the consummation of the rites?

Not a mention of the dwarf's presence in the town had Harris heard, and he wondered thereat.

Was the old fellow waiting until the proper hour should arrive for him to raise a breeze in camp?

It looked that way.

During the day Harris got a glimpse of the prospective bridegroom.

He was a well-preserved looking person of forty years, with a noble, dignified bearing, and would have been pronounced a kind-hearted, easy-going fellow by the casual observer.

Yet there was a firmness about the expression of his features that betokened a will of iron.

Of Madame Cheviot, Harris had not as yet been able to get a glimpse, and therefore could form no estimate of her.

As soon as the office duties were over, he went direct to the shanty, where Kentucky Kit already had the table spread, prepared for the evening repast.

"Well, how has the day passed, here?" he asked pleasantly. "I suppose you have enough to keep you busy."

"Hardly," she replied, with a faint smile. "My thoughts were about all the company I had."

He did not need or care to ask her or whom those thoughts were, for he fancied he knew what the answer would be.

She had been thinking of Deadwood Dick.

"Oh! I had nearly forgotten it. There is a letter on the mantle for you. Some one slipped it in under the door, and was off before I could discover who it was," she added.

He arose and took the letter from the shelf, and seated himself by the table, surprise manifest upon his countenance.

"I don't know who this can be from," he said, noting that there were no directions upon the envelope. "Probably it is from your father, and for you to open."

She received it with some reluctance.

"I hadn't thought of that; maybe it is from him," she said, though there was doubt expressed in her tone.

She tore open the envelope and glanced at the missive—then dropped it with a scream.

"What is the matter?" Harris cried, picking it up. He had the answer before him, however. A sheet of paper headed by the ominous ensign of a skull and crossbones, read as follows:

"DEADWOOD DICK: It is known that you are here, where secret foes are thick and strong against you. Take the chance afforded and escape, or you will be stricken down when you least expect it. This is not gas, but fact. So digest it. 'SURE DEATH.'"

About the same hour that the strange warning brought great surprise to Harris, Madame Cheviot sat in the parlor of her residence, sipping a glass of wine, while she watched the glow of the lamplight upon the carpet.

The madame was a well-preserved woman of considerable beauty of face and figure, and what with the aid of paint, powder and dress, and other youth-producing devices of woman's hand, one would have little dreamed that she was in the forties.

Her attire was fashionable and elegant, and she wore costly jewelry to the enhancement of her personal appearance.

She had just finished the wine, when the door opened, and a penderous-looking Dutchman made his appearance.

"Off you please, my lady," he said, "dere is two fellers mit der front door end, ash wants to see der madame, und tole me uff I no let 'em in dey break der 'hole top off my jaw off."

"Hans, you are incorrigible. Did they give their names?"

"Yas, I dink so. Von off 'em he tole me ash how he vas Ploody Pill, und der odder one sed he vas Black Bob, an' vot he swallered yooost sech vellers like mineself for preekvost, effery night dimes."

"Pshaw! they were only poking fun at you, Hans. Show them in. They are a couple of rough but honest fellows, whom I hired to do some work for me."

Hans accordingly went out, and a few minutes later ushered in two ruffians whom Kentucky Kit had held at bay, up the gulch.

"Be seated, gentlemen," the madame said, courteously. "Hans, you may retire."

When alone with her two visitors, however, the madame's appearance underwent a change.

"Well?" she interrogated, sternly, "what do you want, here?"

"Filthy lucre, mum—rags—rhino—scrip, you see," Bloody Bill said, with a significant grin.

"Exactly! we want inflation!" Black Bob chimed in.

"What for, pray? Did I not tell you that you'd get your reward only when your work was accomplished?"

"Kereet, mum, an' so we bein' in need of finances made a quick job of it," Bill assured, rubbing his hands together, greedily.

"But I know better, you perceive," the madame cried, angrily. "The girl, in company with a longed-haired sport, came here to Placerville, yesterday, and is keeping house over in old Ben Magin's shanty. How do you account for this?"

"Dunno, mum. We p'izened 'em both—she an' the old man, jest as sure as preechin', an' left 'em deader'n wrought-iron door-nails, for crow fodder."

"You lie, sir! I seriously doubt if you even made an attempt. And, now, you come here, expecting pay for a job you did not complete, eh?"

"Eggsactly, mum," Bloody Bill replied, with a sort of leer. "Ye can have it your way, ef ye like, but you must cash up!"

"But I won't! Not a cent will I pay you, till you accomplish your work!" the madame declared, fiercely. "You can play none of your tricks on me."

"Ef ye don't hand over the sand, mum, we'll cut yer precious weazand. Oh! we're handy at sech tricks, you bet. Ha! ha!"

"Still better'n that, we'll report about town as how the madame hired us to put her husband out of the way, so she could marry Darrel, but we got a religious streak an' wouldn't tackle the job," Black Bob said, with a grin. "I wonder how'd that work, pard?"

"I allow et's bad—it's bad," the elder ruffian chuckled. "So ye needn't settle up, mum. We'd jest as leave let the 'count run, an' draw interest."

Madame paled at this, and put up her hands, imploringly.

"No! no! you mustn't do that," she cried, nervously. "That would ruin me. I will pay you, though you did not do as you agreed, rather than have you create a disturbance."

She took a purse from her pocket, and from it extracted a roll of bills. She counted out two hundred dollars, and gave half to each of the ruffians.

"Thankee," Bloody Bill said, with a triumphant leer. "Ye see we wouldn't ask it, only we be two poor but honest, hard-working citizens, who depend on the public to some extent fer script. This will do very well for the present, an' when we want more, we sha'n't be backward about callin' fer it."

"More! do you expect I am a fountain from which you can draw wealth, at your will?" the madame cried, in a passion.

"Yes, mum," Black Bob replied, with a horrible leer. "We've got a gold-mine opened, in you, mum, an' we're goin' ter work it, too, you bet! When we say 'cash', either you smilingly say yes, or we let's the kitten out o' the pillow-case. Ha! ha! It's the giddy layout we have."

Then, laughing, villainously, they arose and mockingly bowed themselves out.

When they were gone, Madame Cheviot rung a bell, and Ralph Randall entered the parlor and took a seat near at hand.

"Well, what have you learned?" the madame asked.

"Nothing, lady. I have made a most careful inquiry, but have not succeeded in hearing any tidings of the dwarf. I doubt if he has yet been near the town."

"Good. If there is no interruption, my marriage with Darrel will be successful. Do you think the girl will make any trouble?"

"Not unless put up to it by the fellow, Harris, whom I believe to be none other than the out-

law, Deadwood Dick. I have sprung the warning on him, that you suggested, and if that does not work, we shall have to adopt some other tactics."

"I'd rather have a dozen ordinary sleuth-hounds here, than that one man," the madame said, slowly. "I have heard enough of him to cause me to fear him. If he is working in Girard Athol's interests, as I suspect, he is a formidable foe."

On the following morning the nuptials were to be consummated, and the town was on the *qui vive*.

Madame Cheviot's mansion was faced in front by a pleasant little grove of maples, underneath whose wide-spreading branches seats and tables had been arranged, whereat a feast was to be served to the inhabitants, in commemoration of the marriage of the two wealthiest people in Placerville.

The miners and their families had as a people never thought too well of either the madame or her affianced, and this little dodge of a feast had been arranged more to secure the lacking good will, than anything else.

A sort of vine-wreath platform had also been built, whereon the ceremony was to take place, and a dancing floor had been laid for the accommodation of would-be terpsichorean revelers, while enterprising vendors had been permitted to erect temporary booths on the grounds, for the sale of "refreshments"—a very necessary accessory.

And, taken all in all, it had the promise of being the greatest event in the annals of Placerville.

By general consent the miners decided to make a holiday of the occasion, and at an early hour the grove presented a festive appearance. Miners arrayed in clean red shirts and Sunday-go-to-meetin' breeches were there—some alone, some in company with "their girls," and some with their wives and children.

No slouch of a place was Placerville, if she was a backwoods mining-camp, for she possessed what none of her sister burghs could boast—a brass band, and this was at the grove, discoursing popular music, by the time the sun's red face arose from behind the eastern hills.

Harris was up early that morning, but early as he was, Kentucky Kit was up ahead of him, and had breakfast under way.

To his surprise he found her now attired in a neat-fitting dress of her own sex, which gave her a more womanly appearance.

"Why this transformation?" he queried. "Are you going to the wedding, to-day?"

A dark expression flitted into her eyes. "Yes, I am going to see this faithless woman who I must with shame realize is my mother!" she said, bitterly. "Will you accompany me?"

"I would, willingly, but am afraid it will be impossible for me to get excused from my duties. Will it not be risky for you to go out alone?"

"Bah, no! I am not afraid; and, moreover, I am armed. If they attempt to harm Kentucky Kit, they'll find she knows how to handle weapons as well as themselves. Do I look afraid?"

"No, nor are you cowardly, for I saw you master the two roughs, up in the gulch. But, keep an eye out for danger, for I fancy the woman will be expecting trouble, and be prepared for it."

Harris went away to the office, not feeling just right about Kentucky Kit's proposed venture.

But the girl had plenty of confidence. Clearing away the dishes, she donned a light cloak and hat, and veiled the upper portion of her face, after which she set out for the grounds, with a pair of trusty revolvers in a belt in under her cloak.

The band was playing a lively air as she entered beneath the cool shade of the overhanging boughs, and the crowd was engaged in various sports, bent on having a good time. In one place a large party were dancing; in another games of quoits and ball were in progress, while in still another, several marksmen were engaged in target practice.

The ceremony was announced to take place at ten o'clock, and promptly at that hour the bridal party appeared upon the platform where the rites were to be performed. This caused a hearty cheer from the assembled people.

There were five in the party—the bride and groom, both elaborately attired; the bride-maid, the madame's sixteen-year-old daughter, and the groomsman, Ralph Randall, and the minister, a seedy but benign looking chap, with

a revolver in his belt, and the mud of the mines on his boots.

After a wedding march by the band, all parties arose, and the ceremony began. A perfect silence reigned throughout the grove; each person stood with heads craned forward, to catch the every word.

The minister had got as far as to ask if any person had aught to say why the marriage should not take place, when a wild shout was heard; then a horseman came dashing furiously into the grove, and up to the marriage stand. The man was—Old Scavenger!

CHAPTER VI.

A BROKEN MATCH.

It was a moment of moments! Every one was excited, as the misshapen little old man dashed into the grove, and jerked his spirited steed back upon its haunches, right in front of the wedding stand.

Madame Cheviot had grown deathly white, and leaned upon Mr. Darrel for support, her eyes glaring at the dwarf with incarnate fury in their expression.

"Stop! stop!" Old Scavenger yelled, raising his hand. "In the name of the law and Almighty God, I forbid the banns. That woman is my wife!"

A murmur of astonishment ran through the crowd.

It seemed to sting the madame to madness, for she rallied, walked to the front of the platform, whiter, yet more composed than before.

"'Tis false! 'tis false!" she cried. "I appeal to you all, ladies and gentlemen, to bear witness, and hear me swear it is false. This nondescript is my brother, and, worst of all, a madman, who has recently escaped from the asylum where I placed him; his terrible charge is but a move of revenge. Fortunately I have anticipated his coming, and prepared for him. Constable, the rest is for you to do!"

At this, a burly six-footer sprung forward to secure the intruder, aided by four able-bodied specials.

Old Scavenger comprehended the situation, and drawing a long, keen-bladed knife, he slipped out of the saddle, and with one blow stabbed the constable to the heart.

Then, seemingly gone stark mad with rage, he cleaved desperately right and left, without regard as to whom he hit, in defending himself.

And it was only after a bloody struggle that he was conquered by overpowering numbers, and bound hand and foot and gagged.

In the struggle five able-bodied men had bit the dust, and as many more had been more or less dangerously wounded.

The little old man trembled like a leaf in the excess of his rage, when held powerless in the grasp of two rough-looking miners, and his eyes were a horrible thing to gaze at, so terrible was their glitter.

The madame had witnessed the struggle with an awful composure, and when she saw the dwarf secured at last, a faint gleam of pleasure rippled over her marble-like face.

"Remove my poor brother to my private parlor," she said, addressing one of the men who had him in charge, "and guard him faithfully till I come. I will have him taken back to the asylum by to-morrow's coach."

The two men accordingly carried the prisoner between them into the madame's residence; then she ordered:

"Remove those who have been killed, and let the ceremony proceed, as if no unpleasantness had happened."

"Stop! this marriage shall not proceed!" a ringing voice cried, and Kentucky Kit pushed forward, her face stern, her eyes flashing with indignation and anger. "Madame Cheviot, as you call yourself, do you know who I am?"

"No! no!" the woman gasped, reeling back and covering her face with her hands. "My God! what—who are you, and what do you want?"

"I am your only legal child—the daughter of yourself and your only lawful husband, Girard Athol, whom your damnable lie has made a prisoner. We came not here to do you harm, woman—we came to recover the gold you stole when you left your husband and little babe, over seventeen years ago. But, if you want war, you can have it. Set my father at liberty, or I will shoot you where you stand!"

"Never!" the madame cried. "George," turning to the bonanza king, "I look to you for protection!"

"But look in vain!" Kit cried. "You have dared the vengeance of your child, faithless mother, and you shall have it."

And, drawing a revolver from under her cloak, she fired full at the would-be-bride, and without awaiting to note the effect, turned and fled.

The crowd made no attempt to stop her—it was a period of indecision when they knew not which way to side.

Consequently Kit made good her escape.

The madame had been wounded, slightly in the arm, but a great control of nerve caused her to not betray the fact.

"Arrest that vagrant!" she cried. "But first, let the ceremony go on!"

"Are you willing, Mr. Darrel," the minister asked, turning to the bonanza king.

"I am not," was the answer. "Until the circumstances of this morning are fully explained to my satisfaction, I must politely but firmly refuse to consummate the wedding. Let the assembly disperse. Madame, I will escort you to the mansion!"

A cheer went up from the crowd.

It was evident the bridegroom had the sympathy of the majority of the spectators, who regretfully began to leave the grounds.

Darrel escorted the lady to the house, followed by Randall and the woman's daughter, and all four entered the grand parlor, where madame and Randall made every attempt possible to explain matters, but without success.

The bonanza king firmly declared he would not proceed further in the matter, until he had proof that the dwarf was not the lady's husband or until the dwarf was dead.

He then took his departure, after which Madame Cheviot dismissed her daughter, and turned upon Randall, the fury of an enraged tigress in her face.

"Foiled!" she hissed. "All is lost. Curses take that devil's imp!"

"It is indeed bad; but I do not think that all is lost, as you say. The marriage yet may come off."

"How? Explain yourself. Nothing but defeat yet has met my schemes."

"True; but that does not signify. Darrel said when you could prove that the dwarf is not your husband, or when he was dead, he'd marry you."

"But I cannot prove that he is not my husband. He has a certificate of our marriage, and is too wily to have it where it could be secured."

"But, you forget. Death would open the road for you. Supposing he were to pass in his checks?—then you could marry Darrel. You have him in your power. Lock him in a room—dead. Go to Darrel, and ask him to visit the dwarf and question him. He goes to the room and finds the dwarf lying dead upon the floor, with a bloody knife by his side. While he is taking in the situation, we and some other persons pounce in upon him, and discover him in the act of removing his rival forever from his path. See? Capital dramatic situation! Darrel finds himself in a very embarrassing position, with only two chances open to him—one, to marry you and have matters hushed—the other, to walk out and take part in a little neck-tie party. Ha! ha! the chances are he would accept the most favorable escape from his dilemma."

"To him, the most favorable would be death. He has hitherto believed me the most exemplary and noble of women, and were I to spring such a trap on him, he'd die rather than bind himself to me in marriage. No! no! that won't work. We must devise a better scheme. Ralph Randall, how long have you been my faithful tool—my trusted confidant and aid in private transactions?"

"For nearly five years, madame."

"Correct. You have served me well. And as your reward I promised you I would, on my next marriage day, give you my daughter's hand in marriage, followed by a donation of five thousand dollars, and a thousand a year thereafter, as long as you made her a good husband."

"You did, madame."

"And I will do as I agreed—but you must work for me. First of all, before working, we must plan. For the present, I shall keep Athol locked up here, under close guard, until I can devise a suitable plan to rid myself of him, without creating suspicion. In the meantime, all remains for you to do. You must put the girl out of the way, and the man Harris. I will leave it to your ingenuity how to do it, and when the two jobs are complete, I will place in your hands a thousand dollars. How do you like that?"

"Good! You have ever been liberal and good to me, and I have in return served you to

your great advantage. So there is no cause for us to quarrel. I will leave you, now, to take observations necessary for the new work before me. It will not be policy to have the girl arrested for the shooting."

"No; that would necessitate a trial, and the defense would call for her father's testimony, and the result would not be to my advantage in all probability. No! it's best that you attack Harris first, and get him quieted; then, if you wish to put the girl out of the way she will have no champion to look after her."

Randall departed on his vile mission, after which the madame removed her wraps and wedding costume, and laid them away in exchange for her ordinary habiliments.

Surveying her white face in the mirror, she turned and left the room.

"I told them to take him to my private parlor," she murmured, "but he must be put in the strong room I had prepared, when this house was built. Ha! ha! Girard Athol, I had been expecting you long before this, but, like your own wily self, you came not, until an opportunity was afforded to strike me a telling blow. But you shall never strike another!"

She swept sternly along the hall to the door of her parlor, her eyes gleaming, wickedly.

She opened the door and entered, without knocking—then, started back, a horrified cry pealing from her lips. What horror was this she witnessed, to thus appall her?

Harris did not get a chance to leave the office during the day, but Mr. Raymond came in and related the occurrences at the grove, and concluded by adding:

"And, the worst of it is, they do tell me that you, my clerk, are actually living with this girl, in the same shanty, and she without a chaperone. This won't do, sir. I'll have no clerk bring disgrace upon my business, through any misdeed like that."

"Take care how you speak of the young woman, for she is my ward, until her father is ready to reclaim her, and I will protect her with my life!" Harris returned. "I heard the old man's pitiful story, and when he asked me to take charge of the girl, and care for her like a sister, I agreed to do so, and I shall protect her, with my life. Good-day, sir."

"Stop! Hold on! What do you mean—where are you going?"

"Going to leave your employ, as you said that my services would no longer be desirable, or words of that meaning, if I continued to live with Miss Athol, and that still remains my resolution."

"But, I was hasty, and make all apologies. I cannot afford to lose you, and therefore I have only myself to blame. Let me hear this whole story, just as you have heard it, and maybe my judgment won't come amiss."

Harris accordingly sat down, and narrated the story of the Athols, as he had heard it. When he had concluded, the broker scratched his head, reflectively, as he remarked:

"If the story of this strange pair be true, and I am more than half inclined to believe it is, this woman is a Jezebel, who ought to be chucked into the deepest prospect hole on the slope. I never have taken any fancy to her, and believe her to be both bold and bad."

"You're right there, as will be proven, before the matter is concluded. In the meantime, I wish to beg a few hours' leave from duty, so that I can investigate the subject of what can be done for Old Scavenger. He is no more crazy than you or I, and he'll fare mighty slim if allowed to remain long at the madame's tender mercy."

"Very likely, and yet, knowing your interest in him, let me advise you to allow him to remain where he is for the present."

"Why?"

"Because, if let loose, and proven sane, the law will nab him for killing Constable Barnes. Then he'd be in a worse fix than he is now. The madame dare not kill him, or have him killed, as the job would naturally be laid on her shoulders."

"Thanks for your valuable advice. I had not thought of that."

So Harris did not get excused until the regular hour, that night.

In addition to buying and selling stocks, Raymond did a general banking business, to which Harris had to attend, as he was left alone for hours at a time.

He was preparing to close the office for that day, when a portly bullwhacker walked in, and slapped a handful of greasy-looking notes down on the counter, and said:

"D'ye see them aire scabs, pilgrim—d'ye see them aire porous-plasters?"

"I see them," Harris replied, counting them over. "A thousand dollars, I see."

"Perzactly, young feller—prezactly a thousand, all greasy an' glorified by ther fact thet they were earned a-takin' pelts up on the Powder. An' I want ter deposit 'em hyar, fer safe keeping. Mebbe I'll want 'em again, right away off—mebbe never. Ef I never come back ag'in, take 'em an' put 'em in yer breeches pocket."

"Very well. I'll put the money in the safe, and you can get it again by calling at any time when I am in."

"But I don't want it put in the safe. I want ye ter keep it right in yer pocket. Ye see, I'm b'ilin' an' sp'ilin' fer a fight, an' a fight I'm bound to hev jest to giv' my blood plenty o' circulation. An' mebbe the first man I meet will lay me out, an' then you'll be a thousand dollars richer. See the p'int? Jest you be stickin' the money in your pocket."

And then the eccentric individual executed a hop-skip-and-jump in anticipation of a fight with some one, and dodged out as unceremoniously as he had put in an appearance.

According to the directions he had received, Harris folded up the money and placed it in his pocket.

Little did he think at the time that it was a trap laid to catch him.

Soon after he closed the office and started for home, for he was anxious to see Kentucky Kit, and plan with her for Old Scavenger's release.

On his way he met a prominent business man named Wray, who appeared in a great hurry, but who stopped at sight of Harris.

"The blazes!" he uttered. "Is the bank closed?"

"Just shut up shop, five minutes ago."

"But you must open. I must have a thousand dollars at once, or lose five. You'll do me the favor, eh?"

"Am sorry, Mr. Wray, but I received imperative orders not to open or transact any business after five P. M.," Harris replied. "However, I think I can fix it. I happen to have that sum with me, and if you'll write me out a check, I'll exchange with you."

Glad of the chance, Wray agreed to this, and they stepped into a store, where he filled out a check for the amount, and gave it to Harris in exchange for the greasy thousand dollars the cashier had only a few minutes before received of the bullwhacker.

CHAPTER VII.

RANDALL AND HIS VICTIM.

AFTER leaving the merchant Harris stepped into a saloon to get a cigar, and while paying for and lighting it, he overheard a bit of conversation between two miners, which interested him.

"Yes, they say the dwarf has escaped, too," one of them was saying. "When the madame went to the house, she went to the room where Kelly and Martin were supposed to be guardin' him, an' w'at d'ye s'pose she saw? Thar was both Kelly an' Martin layin' on the floor, dead, each graspin' a pistol, which had been fired—and the dwarf was nowhere to be found!"

"The deuce you say! He killed 'em, then?"

"That's what no one knows. It's a mystery—a bigger one than thar's been yet to-day, an' the Lord knows thar's been enough. Sum thinks the dwarf did it—sum think Kelly an' Martin got into a quarrel an' killed each other—others reckon the madame did it to throw off suspicion, an' then got rid of the dwarf, while a few reckon the gal had a hand in it; so that altogether it's a consarned mixed-up mess at the best. The undertakin' biz is boomin' now, and I hardly think it will be any worse yet awhile."

Harris went out then, and hurried to the shanty, where he found Kentucky Kit sitting at the supper table, waiting for him, her expression of countenance not so bright as usual.

"Cheer up, for I have news for you," he said. "Your father has escaped!"

"Escaped!" she cried, joyously.

"Yes! he cannot be found!"

Then he related what he had overheard at the cigar store, concerning the double murder, and the theories that were afloat.

"I am afraid he has not escaped," she said, when he had concluded. "I believe that he may have killed the guards, for he was terribly enraged at the madame's accusation, which caused his capture. But, I believe she has recaptured him, and imprisoned him in that very house."

"Well, perhaps! Still I am of the opinion

that he has escaped. At least, let us hope so, until we have better reason to believe otherwise."

Then they talked over the situation at length, but the best they could make of it was not any too favorable.

Each was weighed down by a premonition of approaching trouble, greater than had yet been seen.

That night was a dark one—so dark that the lights about the town gleamed like little stars, and buildings could only be distinguished on close approach.

The sky was overcast with one monster, inky mass of clouds, and a storm was threatened in the detonating, weird pounding of thunder along the horizon.

Still, despite the darkness, a woman stood beneath the shadows of the grove near Madame Cheviot's mansion, evidently waiting for some one, and with impatience, too, for she occasionally stamped her foot, angrily.

Fully half an hour she waited, and was about to leave the grove, when a footstep was heard, and a voice called, softly:

"Milly! Milly!"

"Here, Ralph!" was the reply, and a moment later Ralph Randall and Millicent Raymond stood face to face.

"You sent for me?" he said, inquiringly.

"What is the matter?"

"Yes, I sent for you," she said, in a stern voice; "and you know what the matter is. When are you going to marry me?"

"As soon as I can obtain a position, so that I can support a wife."

"Bah! that story is getting old, and don't satisfy me, any longer. You must marry me now, or within a very few days; and, more than that, we must leave this place. You have put me off until it can go no longer. And, more than that, I hear from an authentic source that you have lately been paying devoted attention to Madame Cheviot's daughter—or rather, her illegal child, according to to-day's showing. Ralph Randall, what do you mean? Have you no hopes of Heaven, or do you want to drive me on to desperation, until I murder you?"

"Well, no. As to the Cheviot, I've only been paying her courtesies for the sake of winning the favor of her dear ma, in hopes that the dear ma's influence might get me a job—that's all. My love for you is as firm as ever. Come here and sit down, Milly," and he led her to a bench and they became seated. "I will now tell you what is what in this question of our marriage. I will or will not marry you; it depends according to which way you decide in the matter I am about to explain to you. That man Harris, I hate and despise, and, when he is dead, I shall not only be richer in cash, but my hatred shall know satisfaction. Now listen, and I will unfold to you a plan!"

And while the thunder muttered growlingly along the western horizon, and an occasional rain-drop pattered down among the leaves, overhead, they sat there in the inky darkness, and Randall spoke in a low, rapid tone, while his dupe listened without a word—indeed she was too horrified to speak, until he was through.

"And you think I ought to do this for you?" she demanded, finally. "What assurance have I that you will fulfill your promise to me, sir, after my dyeing my soul with sin, to satisfy your will?"

"I swear that I will marry you the day that Harris, or Deadwood Dick, is executed, as, with your co-operation, I can easily secure his execution. Then, we will, with our money, turn our backs on this place, and seek a home in the East."

"But, my father; do you think I can thus sin against him, and then go off and leave him?"

"Certainly! He can stand the loss without scarcely missing it, and you can bridle any babyish compunctions you may have. In fact, you have only two choices. On the one hand you have your father, and the inevitable result of a few months to come; on the other hand you have only a few months—possibly a few days, at the furthest, between yourself and a happy life, in some pretty home, with me. It is for you to choose, not I."

There was triumph under all his speech; she felt its keen barb, and shut her teeth together with a snap.

"I understand you, I think," she said, in a quiet way, not common to her, with her impetuous nature and fiery disposition. "You think to have me do your work, and yield up to you the money; then you will cast me off on the world for an unsympathizing people to

jeer at. But, there you reckon wrongly. Though I am only a poor weak girl, desperation nerves me with the strength and determination of a Samson. I will do all that you have outlined to me, but I will keep the money in my own possession until your faith to me is proven beyond doubt. I will work to promote your schemes, and I will be handy to your side when Harris pays the penalty of our villainy. Then, if you refuse to marry me, I'll send you to one of the most horrible deaths that my ingenuity can devise. You shall find that Millicent Raymond is yet able to right her wrongs, or to kill her betrayer and avenge them."

"Pooh! you talk without reason, for there will be no call for such an act. In fact, when I shall realize that my enemy, Deadwood Dick, is really out of the way, I shall be only too happy to take you as my wife, and quit this country, where honesty is not often deemed the best policy, and where, to succeed, a man must needs be a consummate rascal and cut-throat. So, cheer up, my peerless affianced, and work for our mutual interests, looking forward to a bright future near at hand."

He kissed her, then, and they conversed a few minutes in an undertone, after which they shook hands and parted, going in different directions.

As soon as they had gone, two persons arose from positions upon the ground, near where the plotters had sat, and confronted each other in grim silence for a few moments, as if one was waiting for the other to express his views.

Singularly at contrast were these two persons, one being the comical-looking Dutchman of Madame Cheviot's employ, and the other being the fat wench whom Harris and Kentucky Kit had encountered on their way to Placerville.

And it was the Teuton who spoke, and destroyed the effect of the sublime tableau.

"Vell, vot you t'ink apoud it, now?"

It was the one night of all the nights, that Edward Harris, or Deadwood Dick, was ill at ease.

It was just such a warm, threatening night, with thunder booming along the horizon, and lightning flashing around the peaks and into the dark, forbidding canyons, that he had all his wild, adventuresome life delighted in, to mount his fiery horse and dash away through the thickest of the battling elements.

He was, in his most natural, wild, reckless humor, ready for any bold or brave act, when the storm grew fierce; he sat by the shanty window, to-night, listening to the first roll of thunder, and watching the fire play zigzag before his gaze—sat there until the air in the room grew oppressive, and his spirit urged him to wander forth into the coming storm, which enthused him with its own free and turbulent spirit.

Kentucky Kit sat with her head pillowed on her arm on the table, fast asleep, and, knowing she would not be lonely while asleep, Dick left the shanty, and closed the door behind him.

At first he had no clear idea of where he should go; all he sought was the open air, where he could listen to the full, deep tones of heaven's artillery and see its vivid flashes—where he could catch the bracing breeze against his heated brow.

And yet, not heeding the course he was taking, he not long after found himself in the depths of a lonely gulch beyond the town, and at a point where three other gulches branched off in as many different directions.

He had been so busied in thought that by the time he came to a halt opposite the four routes, he was puzzled to know which way he had come.

The storm was now beginning to come down, in earnest, too, and, on deliberation, he concluded to hunt a sheltering rock till it was over, rather than attempt to find his way back to town.

Selecting one of the gulches, which he supposed was the correct route to Placerville, he strode along, looking right and left, until he spied a ledge of rock protruding from the canyon wall, under which the now pouring rain did not penetrate, and accordingly he was not slow in taking possession.

The storm was soon at its height, the water descending in torrents, the lightning flashing spitefully, and the thunder causing the earth to tremble.

Lighting his pipe, Deadwood Dick sat and enjoyed the wild storm, for it brought back to him, vividly, memories of a past that had not been all sunshine nor all shadow, but a mixture of both.

He might have sat there all night, had the rain continued, but it did not, and when it had

stopped entirely, he started back for Placerville.

He had to try all of the gulches before he found the right one, and as a consequence, it was late at night ere he arrived back at the shanty.

Kentucky Kit was standing in the doorway, when he approached, and she uttered a cry of joy and ran forward to join him.

"Oh, I am so glad you have come back," she said. "When I awakened and found that you was gone, I was very much alarmed and worried. Why, you are all wet—where have you been?"

"Oh, I've been out enjoying the storm," Dick replied. "Did you think I had deserted you?"

"Yes. But I am glad you have not. I should be very unhappy if you were to leave me."

"But it is wrong to feel that way, Miss Athol. It is likely your father will be back in due time, to assume your protection, and then I must bid you good-by."

"No, you mustn't. I have found you out, and I was not wrong, after all. You are Deadwood Dick; I found the letter that was sent you, signed 'Sure Death,'—and you are the only man I love or ever can love. So there, now—I have gone and said it, and though it may be unmaidenly, I mean it."

Deadwood Dick gave vent to a whistle, denoting considerable surprise, a good deal of doubt, and maybe a little vexation. Anyhow, his brows knitted, and he forced a light laugh.

"Well, if the cat's out of the bag, so be it; and I'm much obliged for your candor, but sorry you have been so unwise as to single me out as a choice, from among a world of honest and honored men. Time, however, and a better knowledge of my wild self, will doubtless dissipate this little infatuation, and you will learn to regard me only as a friend and acquaintance."

"Never!" she said, firmly; then seeing that he was evidently not desirous of talking on the subject, she said no more, soon bidding him good-night, and retiring to her room.

Dick also retired to his apartment, but could not sleep. His mind was troubled with a premonition of approaching danger, and whenever he would fall into a slight doze, he would speedily awaken.

"Something is wrong, somewhere," he finally said, sitting up on his bed, "or I shouldn't be in this condition. I half suspect that all's not right at the bank."

The thought grew upon him so that he finally put on his clothing, and quietly leaving the shanty, he hurried toward the broker's office.

"It can't do any harm, anyhow, and I may be in time to do some good," he muttered. "It's rarely I pass so restless a night without something happening."

It was the darkest hour before dawn, and he was the only person abroad.

Therefore, not desiring to arouse attention to his being out, lest it should create suspicion and make him trouble, he moved along rather stealthily, until he reached the bank.

Everything about the place was quiet and there were no signs of anything being out of order, as viewed from the outside. Although he had a key, he did not use it to effect an entrance, for it occurred to him that, should he be discovered in the bank, at this unseasonable hour, it would place him in rather a delicate position.

"All's well, here, evidently," he said, as he crossed the street, and retraced his steps in the direction of the shanty, "though I shouldn't be a bit shocked to learn that the d—l is to pay, in the morning. And, what is more, I sha'n't be much taken aback if I never succeed in getting out of this place, alive. It must naturally be that my lucky day of escapes is about over. Ha! what in the deuce—!"

He had stumbled and nearly fallen over the prostrate form of a man who lay outstretched across the sidewalk!

CHAPTER VIII.

DEADWOOD DICK IN THE TOILS.

His first thought was that he had run across some drunken miner who had succumbed to the allurements of "old insane asylum," as bad whisky is often most appropriately termed in the West, but, at a second glance, he was not a little horrified to behold a huge bowie-knife protruding from the man's breast; and moreover, the victim of the murder was none other than the same eccentric pilgrim who had a few hours before given Harris his roll of money for safe-keeping.

He had come in from over the range, 'a-b'il-in' an' sp'ilun' fer fun, and had evidently been

meted out a standard Placerville measureful of it.

Without thinking of the consequences, Deadwood Dick stooped over and drew the knife from the wound, muttering:

"Poor reckless devil! I was afraid it would come to this when he left the money with me. I saw, then, he was bound to have a time of it!"

Just as he was speaking, sounds of the approaching footsteps of two or more persons startled him.

What a situation was his to be discovered in! The thought thrilled him with a feeling something akin to alarm, and turning, he dropped the knife and fled swiftly and as noiselessly as possible toward the shanty.

The footsteps in the rear quickened also, but paused when they came to the form of the murdered miner. Then there was a great shout of "Murder! Murder!" in a stentorian voice.

"I'm in for it now," Dick muttered, quickening his steps. "I wonder why it is I am always getting into trouble like this, when the average of humans peregrinate through a pathway strewn with roses? By the way, ill-luck is plentiful to-night."

This latter conclusion was drawn after he had passed a woman who was hurrying in an opposite direction, and whom he recognized as Madame Cheviot!

She evidently recognized him, too, for she turned and gazed after him in manifest surprise.

Dick gained the shanty at last, and entering locked the door behind him. He then sought his room, and examined his weapons, to find them all in excellent working order.

"If worst comes to worst, I shall need them, and use them," he muttered, with compressed lips. "It has gone about as long as usual without my having a hand in some sort of a scrimmage and I allow I may reasonably expect a whirl, pretty soon."

But though he expected that Madame Cheviot would send the men who had discovered the murdered miner, after him, Harris was this time disappointed, and morning dawned without any molestation being offered him.

He had a fire kindled and breakfast undergoing preparation ere Kitty put in an appearance, and they were soon seated at the table, partaking of the morning repast.

It was while they were thus engaged that there was a knock at the door, which was partly open, and Mr. Wray, accompanied by Mr. Raymond, the broker, entered the room.

Although a little surprised, Harris arose from the table, having just finished his meal, and handed them chairs, after which he re-seated himself.

"A most pleasant morning after the rain!" he said, by way of greeting.

"Remarkably so," Raymond said, calmly.

"Have you done your breakfast, Mr. Harris?"

"Quite through; yes. Is there something for me to do, so early, at the office?"

"Something for you to do, yes, sir, but not at the office. There are several little matters on hand which makes it necessary for me not to consider you any longer in my employ, sir."

"Indeed! What has caused this decision? I fail to understand."

"Well, sir, if your comprehension is so frail, an explanation is certainly due you. In the first place, you last evening cashed a check for Mr. Wray, here, after banking hours, did you not?"

"I did, sir. I met Mr. Wray, and he wanted money so bad, that I cashed his check with a thousand dollars that had been left with me by a miner, for safe-keeping."

"Ah! but how came you to have this miner's money about your person? Why did you not leave it in the safe?"

"The man brought it in after I had closed and locked the safe for the night. Contrary to your orders, I should have yet placed the money in the safe, only the fellow said not, as he was liable to want it again in a few hours, and wanted me to keep it about my person."

"Well, you tell a very plausible story, sir, and I should be tempted to believe you, but other circumstances are against you. The money you gave Mr. Wray is counterfeit, and it don't look likely a stranger would be apt to give counterfeit money to a banker's clerk, for safe-keeping. Moreover, as soon as Mr. Wray notified me this morning, I went to the bank, and found that good money to the amount of five thousand dollars had been extracted from the safe, during the night, and spurious notes for the same amount had been put in their place!"

Deadwood Dick felt like groaning under this blow, but he was outwardly very calm.

"This is bad business, and I am very sorry," he said. "I can return Mr. Wray his check, but as I know nothing about this other matter, I can only sympathize with you in your loss."

"Sympathy is but poor consolation in such an hour as this, and yet, were these all the charges against you, I, for my part, should yet have some belief in your innocence."

"Oh! so there are other charges, eh?"

"Ay—another charge worse than that of handling bogus money. You are charged with murdering an unknown miner, near Saunders's saloon, last night. About the same time that two men named Dawley and Goldy discovered the body, Madame Cheviot met you running toward this shanty. Thus, to all intents, Harris, you seem to be under a cloud which is not lightened, to any extent by a declaration on the part of several citizens, that you are undoubtedly the notorious road-agent and desperado, Deadwood Dick. Therefore, if you yield to arrest, I and Wray will see that you are given a trial for life and liberty, while on the other hand, if you refuse to submit to arrest, there are enough sturdy men waiting outside to take you, dead or alive."

"I am not inclined to resist," Harris said. "If I am given a trial, and allowed to plead my own case I am satisfied I can not only prove my own innocence, but show up the guilty ones. My only request is that you will see that my ward, here, is properly taken care of, and shielded from harm."

"She shall be cared for in my own home, on your account," Mr. Raymond said. "I am loth to believe you as bad as you seem, and will, although a party of the prosecution, do what I can for you."

"Then, send in your officers. Kitty, I will consign you to Mr. Raymond's protection, until this matter is settled."

Three burly miners were signaled to enter, and, at Raymond's direction, they bound Deadwood Dick's hands behind his back, and disarmed him.

"There is a little document in my vest pocket I should like you to take care of," Dick said to Raymond. "It may not do me any good now, but, if I am acquitted, it will be of use to me in the future."

The broker secured it and examined it, with some surprise.

"Ah!" he said. "If a Deputy Marshal, why have you not made known the fact before?"

"Because I came here to work up a certain case, quietly. If I am arrested, my business must cease until I am released, or until the United States Marshal drops down this way."

"It has just occurred to me," Mr. Wray said, addressing Raymond, "that if this young man is really a professional shover of the 'queer,' he possibly has a stock of the stuff on hand. It may not be a bad idea to search the shanty."

The search was accordingly made, and, as a result, three goodly sized packages of counterfeit bills were brought to light. When shown to Deadwood Dick, he was nearly dumfounded with amazement, and made no attempt at an explanation, for, indeed, what was there in his power to explain? He had no knowledge of how the spurious money came there—he only knew that he was fairly interwoven in the web of a bold, deep plot, designed to ruin him.

Therefore, bidding good-by to Kentucky Kit, and telling her to have courage, he was led off to jail.

Placerville had anticipated the need of such an institution, and when the first discovery of the auriferous had awakened in the bosoms of its founders a resolve to build a city, they had first and foremost constructed a serviceable structure of stone, and christened it the "Corral," and here it had been customary to corral such spirits as were refractory, or otherwise unfit to be at large.

To this "Corral," Deadwood Dick was at once taken, and locked in a strong apartment on the second floor, where he was to remain until it should please his captors to give him a trial.

And when he sat down upon the simple straw bed with which his cell was furnished, and gave way to deliberation, the prospect of an early trial was in no way particularly cheering, as he could not see any chance of its being the means of his acquittal.

Circumstantial evidence was strongly against him, and he was illly prepared for defense.

Several days passed—a week, to a day, from the time of Deadwood Dick's arrest, and still he was confined, seeing no one but his guard, and

learning little or nothing of what was going on outside of his prison.

In the mean time, out in the little mining camp, things ruled about as usual, with little or nothing to add to the excitement that had lately been aroused.

Placerville being the only town in its own wild section of the hills, a form of judicial government had been established, and court was held monthly, to try such cases as appealed to justice for settlement. Therefore it would be two weeks yet, ere Deadwood Dick could receive his trial, and having no one to go his bail, he had no prospect but to spend the interval in his cell.

Kentucky Kit had taken up her abode with the Raymonds, and she and Millicent soon became fast friends.

The broker's daughter was in poor health, and it was apparent to even a casual observer that she was not long for this world.

She had a constant cough that evidenced a consumptive predisposition; she was gradually growing weaker, and her spirits were becoming daily more depressed.

To Kentucky Kit, who had a faculty of reading secrets, it was apparent that this pale-faced girl was being weighed down by some secret trouble, but she made no mention of her discovery lest she should offend.

She knew that Milly often went out after dark, and was gone for an hour or more, and on her return she was generally more out of sorts than when she started forth. Kitty was also aware that these night excursions, as it were, were not known to Mr. Raymond, who spent every evening in his study, from eight until eleven, poring over piles of newspapers and business documents.

"Something is wrong!" the girl often mused, "and I feel that it is my duty, both to poor Milly and her father, to solve the matter."

The opportunity came at last.

On the day after Deadwood Dick had been in jail just a week, a boy brought a letter to the house, addressed to Miss Millicent Raymond, in a bold masculine chirography.

Millicent was in bed at the time, in her room up-stairs, faint and weak from a distressing coughing spell, and Kentucky Kit, chancing to be down-stairs, received the letter.

"Gentleman sed as how it was important business," the boy said, on delivering the letter; then he doffed his hat and was gone.

With the letter in her hand, Kitty entered the parlor, and sat down near a window, her eyes riveted upon the directions on the envelope.

"It is my duty to take this direct up-stairs to Miss Milly," she said, thoughtfully, "and yet something prompts me to know its contents. I am not mistaken as to who is the author of this chirography—I should know Ralph Redwing's handwriting anywhere. What can he be writing to Miss Raymond for? Is he paying her lovely attentions? That is probably the truth of the matter. If so, it is my business to find it out, and take a hand in the game before the thing progresses too far. Instead of opening the letter, I will open a secret to Miss Raymond."

She went up-stairs, and found the broker's daughter lying in bed, reading.

"Excuse me," Kitty said, "but I came to ask you a few questions, which, though they may seem impertinent, are asked, I assure you, for our mutual benefit."

"Of course, I will answer them, as I like you, and know you are my sincere friend, dear," Millicent replied, laying aside her book. "What is it you would ask?"

"First of all, have you an acquaintance by the name of Ralph Randall Redwing?"

"I know a man by the name of Ralph Randall, but he never told me he had an additional name."

"What for looking sort of a chap is he?" Kit asked, eagerly.

Miss Raymond gave a description of him, whereupon Kit said:

"Then they are one and the same person—that is evident to me. Excuse me, please, but what relation does this man Randall bear to you?"

"What reason have you to suppose that he bears any relation to me?"

"Because I have just received a letter for you, directed in his handwriting."

"Ah! then you know him?"

"I do know him. But you have not answered my question."

"It can be answered briefly, then. Ralph Randall is my betrothed husband—more, is the father of my unborn babe."

"Then, may God have mercy upon you," Kitty said, huskily, as she rose to depart.

"Stop!" Millicent cried, springing from the bed, and intercepting her. "What do you mean? Tell me, at once—tell me all! Don't keep back anything from me!"

"Maybe it is wicked in me to thus torture you!" Kitty said, slowly, as she laid Randall's letter in the hands of the broker's daughter, "but it will be merciful to warn you, even at this late date. Know, then, that the man who wrote that letter is a fugitive from justice, and is my own husband!"

CHAPTER IX.

KIT FACES THE RECREANT.

ANOTHER week dragged along, and things moved in their usual tenor.

Deadwood Dick still in jail—his trial was not to come off until the coming week, on Tuesday.

Kentucky Kit remained with the Raymonds and seldom left the house, for Millicent was now confined to her bed, prostrated by the blow that had come to her with the knowledge of Ralph Randall's treachery.

Letters came from him, nearly every day, but Kitty always managed to intercept them, and destroy them, so that Mr. Raymond should not get hold of them.

The poor sick girl would often awaken in the dead of night, and beg of Kentucky Kit to keep her secret away from her father, who was in none too good health, and Kit had no other choice than to promise.

She also interceded with the physician, who nodded gravely in assent.

"It will be but human," he said, in an undertone, "for, unless a great change takes place, soon, the secret will be buried with her, in one grave."

To make matters worse, Mr. Raymond was taken sick on Wednesday, with paroxysms of the heart, and before daybreak, the next morning, he was a corpse!

Prior to his death, however, he had called in a lawyer, and made a will, bequeathing his wealth to Millicent, and appointed Mr. Wray as her guardian and the overseer of all his business.

On being notified, Mr. Wray called, and he and Kitty held a long consultation, and it was decided not to inform Millicent of her father's death, for she was sinking rapidly, and the shock would only serve to accelerate her death.

The body was consequently removed to Mr. Wray's residence, from whence a quiet funeral was to take place, on the morrow.

Nearly as soon as the news of Mr. Raymond's death got abroad, Ralph Randall sent a note to the house, directed to Millicent. Although he had been informed that she was quite ill, he knew not just how sick she was.

Kentucky Kit received the note, and went to her room to read it, a stern expression on her pretty face.

"The crisis is at hand," she muttered, as she tore off the wrapper. "The time has come for me to face him, and let him know that I have recognized him, if he has not me."

The letter was what she had partly anticipated, and ran as below:

"DEAR MILLICENT: For the last time I take my pen to write you. It's played out—this game of being sick and unable to see me; it won't wash. I mean business, now, as you'll find out. I'm all in readiness to step forward as your husband, and fill your dead father's shoes, and be one of the most indulgent of spouses. Don't think, because you've come in for a little wealth, that you can put me off, for you can't do it. If you don't send for me, and acknowledge me as your husband, I will have my revenge by declaring your condition, publicly, and using my utmost efforts to further complete your ruin. I love you, devotedly, and it has gone too far for you to trifle with me, now, except you want to arouse all the devil in my nature. Send for me to come, to-night, or everybody's mouth will be full of gossip to-morrow. Your lover,

"RALPH RANDALL."

"How fortunate that I, instead of Millicent, am to receive the scoundrel!" Kitty murmured, her eyes flashing fire. "I fancy I can receive Mr. Ralph Randall Redwing, alias Redwing, the horse-thief, with considerable warmth."

She penned a note as nearly in imitation of Milly's chirography as possible, and sent a boy with it to Randall; the note stated that Miss Raymond would receive Mr. Randall in the parlor of the Raymond residence, at sharp seven, that evening.

But, when Randall entered the parlor, that evening, the door was quickly closed and locked behind him, and he wheeled, in surprise, to find himself face to face with Kentucky Kit!

"Miss Athol!" he gasped, starting back—

"Jessie Byrd! In heaven's name, girl, what—who are you?"

"Just plain Mrs. Ralph Randall Redwing," Kit replied, coolly. "When you got into a flirtation with me, and married me, up at Cheyenne, I called myself Jessie Byrd, but my name was, in reality, Kitty Athol. How inopportune it was, too, that, not ten minutes after our marriage, you had to light out because the U. S. Marshal was after you for horse-theft—you, the branch of a royal family of lords, dukes, or something of the kind, over in Europe. Ha! ha! ha!"

Randall stood glaring at her, like a man bereft of his senses.

"So it is really you, eh?" he finally demanded, coldly. "I had no idea you and Jessie Byrd were the same, though I noticed the resemblance, the other day, at the wedding that was to have been."

"It is really your legal wife."

"Pshaw! don't be foolish. I suppose I may as well tell you that that marriage was but a mockery, and you are no more my wife than any other woman."

"Bah! I know better. I took pains to investigate the matter, and found that my certificate is good."

"Where is it?"

"Where you'll never get your hands on it, you may bet on that."

"Humph! I'd not harm it. Why did you send for me? Do you want me to come and live with you?"

"Bah! no! I don't want any horse-thieves hitched to my apron-strings. Got a better feller than you, ten times over."

"But he's in jail, though," Randall retorted, with a malicious chuckle.

"That don't matter," independently. "He'll get free, and you'll go in to occupy his place."

"What do you mean, girl?"

"I mean just this!" Kitty replied, setting her foot firmly on the floor. "Your game is up, so far as Millicent Raymond is concerned. You are nothing to her, nor can you get a cent of her property, while I live. You have already ruined her, and if you dare to execute the threat that was contained in your letter to-day, I will telegraph to the next town for a marshal, and have you arrested—not only for horse stealing, mind you, but for a certain murder that came to light, at Cheyenne, after your flight, in which your agency was clearly proven."

"And if I withdraw my attack on this girl—what then?"

"Then, we will cry quits, until I catch you at some other villainous game."

"Well, then I'll withdraw my suit, though I would like to get a slice of the old man's property. But your interference has knocked that in the head. I dare say you are anxiously waiting for me to pass in my checks, so that you can lawfully remarry, eh?"

"With all patience and hope," Kentucky Kit replied. "The sooner you can make it convenient, the sooner I shall be highly elated to attend your funeral."

"Well, you're practical, by Jove! How's the Raymond, up-stairs? Liable to peg out, soon?"

"I fear she will not live long. We are trying to keep the news of her father's death from her, lest it shall be the means of hastening her death."

"Well, I hope she may go off soon, as it will accommodate me, greatly," the young villain acknowledged, with a malicious grin. "I allow I'd better be going, now, for these are dark nights, and it's not safe for such model young men as I to be abroad. Good-evening, dear! Give my love to your humpback old dad, when he happens around."

On the following day, the funeral of Mr. Raymond took place, and was largely attended by the townspeople. The remains were interred upon a grassy slope that overlooked the town.

Deadwood Dick in his dungeon, had been informed of the broker's sudden demise, and a feeling of deepest sadness stole over him.

"I wonder if so much trouble would have occurred, if I had never showed my face here?" he mused. "Nearly everywhere I go some disaster always arises, and drags one or more persons into its toils. What am I living for, anyhow? I have no one to cherish and care for—all those that I ever loved are gone, it is to be hoped, to a better sphere—all, even to my darling little boy. What a strange lifetime I have lived through in the last five years, and yet I am comparatively a boy, as far as health and spirits go. I would I were an old man—perhaps I could better bear to give up this life,

and look forward for peace. As it is, the only peace I can see in my future is a—piece of rope. That I shall most certainly get, unless some unforeseen and unexpected circumstance turns up to cause my liberation. Poor Kitty! I wonder how she is faring, all this time? It seems to me that I would be glad to see her once more."

Kentucky Kit did not attend the funeral, but remained by the bedside of poor Millicent, and cared for her with all a sister's tenderness. The sick girl was very flighty in mind; it was evident that the slender thread which linked her being with life, must soon snap in twain.

Madame Cheviot accompanied by Ralph Randall, attended Mr. Raymond's funeral, and after its conclusion went back to the madame's mansion, where, in the parlor, they became seated for a consultation.

"Well, what do you think of my work so far?" Randall asked, lighting a cigar, and elevating his heels upon a table.

"So far as I comprehend, you have done well. But I fail to understand how you have worked it, so cleverly, without detection."

"Easily enough. I hired an old chap to work for me, and armed him with some 'queer,' which he worked off into Harris's possession, for safe-keeping. As luck would have it, Harris cashed a check for Wray with this same money. In fact, his Satanic majesty has been my guardian, all through. That same night, I caused Raymond's daughter, who is in my power, to rob her father's safe of money, and put bogus in its place. While she was doing this, I watched my chance and slipped into Harris's shanty and deposited another batch of counterfeit there, so that when the denouement came, there was plenty of evidence of his guilt. As to the other business, I was returning from my visit to Harris's shanty, when I met my tool, and he threatened to blow on me, if I didn't fork over, handsome. Seeing no other avenue of escape, I knifed him, and slid off. Luck favored me again, by sending Harris along, a short time afterward, in order that you might encounter him, and suspicion him as the murderer. Altogether things have worked like a charm."

And the arch-villain laughed as a demon might laugh.

"True, everything seems cut and dried as far as the road-agent is concerned. My only fear, since learning that he is a Deputy U. S. Marshal, is that some of his associates will happen along, about the time of his trial, to free him, and make us trouble."

"No fear of that, but it will be well enough for us to cage the girl, and, that, at once. With her in quietus, Deadwood Dick will stand a poor show for acquittal; and then, too, with her missing, Deadwood Dick dead, and the dwarf out of the way, what's to hinder you from again working up Darrel?"

"True; if the girl is put where she will be quiet, the road-agent killed, and Athol does not again appear, I may have some hopes, again—"

Randall interrupted her, with a peculiar laugh.

"Do you know what I have believed, ever since the wedding day?" he demanded, sending a cloud of smoke ceilingward.

"How should I?" the madame asked, languidly.

"Well, I have believed that it was you who killed the guards, and that you have Athol confined in the secret dungeon you once told me was in the rocky cliff, against which this house is built."

"I can well wish your suspicion correct," the woman said, with a faint smile, "for then, I should feel safe. No! Girard Athol escaped that day, but how, or where, I have no clear idea. I have sometimes been beset with the absurd apprehension that he is yet lurking within this house, but I have searched every nook and corner over and over again, and failed to find a trace of him. Apparently he is gone from here;—whether to return or not, I can not guess."

"You may not see him or hear from him again for some time."

"True. If he would only remain away until I could marry Darrel, I should take pains that he never troubled me thereafter. For Darrel's money I have been scheming, and I shall not give up until I win or lose, beyond the power of love, law or fear to help me."

"There are ways to work the thing successfully, and I flatter myself I can concoct a plan, ere long. In the mean time, if you can let me have a little good money, I will go forth and liquidate a few bar bills which necessity has forced me to contract. Ah! thanks," as the madame handed him a couple of twenties.

"By the way, how had we better go to work to decoy the girl, and where shall we put her after we capture her?"

"The dungeon will be a good place. There is but one key, and I always carry that. It is a place where a person might remain a lifetime—searched for, and yet lost to the world."

"But how can she be entrapped here? She is as wary and suspicious as a hawk."

"You are a graduate in devilry—I will leave it to you to arrange. If you are successful, I will pay you well."

"You are ever liberal, my gracious madame. The girl will have to be decoyed to the grove, and then taken by force. You will have the cell ready?"

"Of course."

"And also put your Dutch blunderbuss of a servant where he won't be too contiguous? I don't take any stock in that sauerkraut barrel."

"Pshaw! he's a combination of ignorance and innocence."

"Perhaps. And now for the decoy. Have you a specimen of Girard Athol's penmanship?"

"Yes—several letters. I will get them for you."

She soon produced them, and Randall studied the chirography closely.

"Get me a piece of common brown paper and a pencil, now," he said, "and I think I can fix matters."

He set to work, and soon had the following letter formed, in a style of writing very closely resembling that of the other letters:

"DEAR CHILD: I write this to let ye know I am still alive and well. I dare not come into the town in daylight, but I will venture in to-night, at midnight, and you will find me where the wedding-stand was, in the grove. Fetch me some bread and meat, as I haven't had much to eat lately."

"Your loving father,
"GIRARD ATHOL."

"There! I allow the fox will nibble at that bait," Randall exclaimed, with a villainous shrug. "Look out for us about midnight!"

CHAPTER X.

SATAN'S WORK.

KENTUCKY KIT received the note that night while standing in the doorway of the Raymond residence to get a breath of fresh air after coming from the sick-room, where Millicent had fallen asleep.

It was handed her by a dirty-looking urchin, who first paused and surveyed her critically.

"Be you Kentucky Kit?" he asked, doubtfully, "fer ef ye be, I've got a letter fer ye, what wuz given ter me, up in the mountings, by the durnedest-lookin' little old codger I ever sot eyes on."

"Yes, I am Kentucky Kit," the girl replied, eagerly reaching forth her hand for the scrap of paper, "and I am ever so much obliged to you for bringing me this."

She hurried into the house and read it over and over again joyously.

"My poor old father! how glad I shall be to see him! If I can only get Millicent to sleep, about midnight, I shall be safe to run over to the grove and meet him, if only to stay for a few minutes. I wonder what he proposes to do next?"

Never for a minute did the idea come into her pretty head that all was not right;—no suspicion came to her that the letter was a forgery, for the writing was like Old Scavenger's chirography, and the fact that the message was written on brown wrapping paper seemed to indicate that he had used the only scrap attainable in the hills.

By using a little opiate in her medicine, which the doctors had ordered, Kitty had Millicent in a sound sleep, by midnight;—then, bare-headed, she ran across the road into the grove, which was but a few steps from the Raymond residence.

Threading her way softly among the grim old trees, she soon came to where the wedding stand had been erected, and yet remained; but she could see nothing of Old Scavenger anywhere near it.

"Father!" she called—"father! Are you here?"

Then she heard a low laugh, but before she could discover whence it came, a heavy blanket was thrown over her head; then she was seized and held by several pairs of hands.

She tried to scream, but could not make herself heard, for the blanket was held tightly over her mouth until she nearly swooned, and overcome partly by that, and partly by alarm, she fainted.

When she awakened, she was in Stygian

darkness; not an inch before her face could she see.

"Finding her hands and feet free, she arose, and felt her way through the awful gloom until she ran against a wall of cold smooth rock. She followed this, by feeling with her hands, until she came to the conclusion that she was entombed in a dungeon, with walls of solid rock, but where it was, or where she was, was a conundrum she could not solve.

Of course Kentucky Kit was in the madame's dungeon, and Randall and the Jezebel both had a hand in placing her there, after which Randall went back to his lodgings, and Madame Cheviot retired to her own decidedly elegant sleeping apartment.

"Things work well!" she mused, "and I shall yet have the satisfaction of fingering the moneybags of George Darrell! Once I am his wife, I shall hold the ruling reins, else there will be room for him in the same place where Cyril Cheviot went. Humph! one would think, after all my awful deeds, that my conscience would chide me, but it does not. I don't believe there is such a thing as conscience or I should have felt its chidings long ere this. My only conscience is a love—a passion for gold. And why? What good does it do me? None, and yet my thirst for it constantly increases; my coffers grow fuller, day by day. If all works as I wish, and work for, I shall yet be known as the Bonanza Queen." And she smiled serenely at the thought!

She retired to her couch, but was restless, despite her brave words. She felt a nervous fear of something that was to come.

In desperation, she arose and drank a deep draught of liquor from a decanter on a stand by her bed, and this seemed to lull her restlessness, for she soon dropped asleep.

She did not rest soundly, however, and after awhile sat bolt upright in bed, as wide awake as ever in her life.

A gasp escaped her as she discovered that the light which she had left burning was extinguished, and on turning her head, she saw something that caused a moan of horror to break from her lips.

Upon the wall just opposite her bed, some hand unseen had traced the following words in phosphorescent fire:

"Beware! Unless you undo all
The wrongs you have done, before
The next full moon,
Your doom is sealed. G. A."

She could but comprehend, even while quaking with alarm which the sight of the flaming words had caused her.

Girard Athol had been there—there in her very room—and left his warning of vengeance. Before the next full moon!

That would be within a few days.

At first she resolved to arouse the household, and have a search made for the intruder, but a second warned her it was best to keep the matter quiet.

However, she sat up for the remainder of the night, a revolver clutched tightly in her grasp.

Something else transpired that night, worthy of narration.

After leaving the Cheviot mansion, Ralph Randall stood for several minutes in the grove, without having decided in which direction to turn his footsteps.

"The girl is out of the way!" he muttered, "and Deadwood Dick is destined to swing for his pains in coming to Placerville. By the way it may not be too late to work up the husband biz, with Miss Raymond. I dare say Kit left her alone, when she came to the grove, and it behooves me to go over and look after her."

He crossed to the Raymond residence, and boldly entered.

Finding no one in the lower part of the house, he hastened up-stairs to the room Millicent had occupied, but she was not there!

With an oath he searched the other parts of the house for her, but all to no avail.

Millicent had gone, and left nothing to indicate her whereabouts.

The following day was Sunday—a day devoted to rest among the rough and ready residents of Placerville, if lounging about saloons and playing "seven-up," could be termed resting.

The Reverend Obadiah Grimes rang the "meetin'-us" bell at the usual hour for divine services, but the lambs who were lured into the fold of this pioneer shepherd, were few and far between.

There were too many inducements to excitement in saloons and street for the men to be

tempted into the "sarmon shell," as they called the rude church; consequently, the Rev. Grimes had to discourse almost wholly to an audience of "sister'n."

Those topics uppermost in the minds of the Placerville inhabitants were the approaching trial and probable execution of Deadwood Dick—the mysterious disappearance of Kentucky Kit, and the likewise mysterious disappearance of Millicent Raymond.

For of her, or the Athol girl, no trace could be found, though a diligent search was made.

Opinions were various on all these subjects, but the general conclusion seemed to be that Deadwood Dick would fail to get evidence sufficient to clear him; that Kentucky Kit had either thought best to leave the place, while she could do so unmolested, or had been put out of the way by Madame Cheviot's agency; that Millicent Raymond, laboring under mental excitement and grief, had wandered into the mountains, and would, in all probability, never be found alive.

As soon as the fact that the late broker's daughter was missing became known, Ralph Randall blossomed forth with a crape band around his hat, and told a very pathetic story, with a few bogus tears in his eyes, the purport of which was that he had secretly wedded Millicent Raymond, nearly a year before, as her father had refused his consent; that Millicent had promised to acknowledge him as her husband at the expiration of the first six months, but when that time arrived she had put him off, and continued to do so, since.

At last, a few days previous to her father's death, he, Randall, had threatened to make known their relations, at which the poor girl had gone off into a swoon, from which she had not recovered, in her right mind. Unluckily, explained Randall, Mr. Raymond had chanced to overhear the conversation, and the knowledge had most probably been so sudden and exciting that it had been too much for him, with his long-standing affection of the heart. Randall accounted for Millicent's sudden disappearance in the same light as the town people, and with much apparent anxiety and interest, offered a reward of a thousand dollars to the person who would restore to him his demented darling.

It was a very cleverly concocted story, and gained general credence, as it had been known for some time that Randall and Miss Raymond were in the habit of holding clandestine meetings, and that helped the scheme along. By the will of the broker, if Millicent should be dead, the property would go to her nearest heir. Who else would it be but Randall?

Madame Cheviot, however, did not fare as well in public opinion as Randall, for the sentiment was not favorable toward her. The disappearance of the dwarf had undoubtedly excited a suspicion of foul play, in the minds of the people, and now that Kentucky Kit had also suddenly disappeared, many very complimentary hints were openly discussed concerning the madame.

That Sunday evening Deadwood Dick felt was the most lonely one of his imprisonment, and his thoughts were of anything but a pleasant nature, for the turnkey had been in and informed him of the incidents that had lately occurred in the outside world.

That Sunday evening, too, was the scene of a highway encounter, on the gulch road in the heart of the mountains, three or four miles from Placerville, which savored of business.

The young moon had reached its meridian, and was casting a sickly glimmer upon the rugged landscape, when a wagon came jolting along over the trail.

It was a rude, lumbering affair, with a canvas cover, and was drawn by a large raw-boned gray horse that looked as if it were not in the habit of associating with food more than once a year.

The driver was as lean and cadaverous-looking as the horse—a man with thin, straggling hair and beard, with sharp, angular features and sallow eyes, and attired in blue overalls, red shirt, slouch hat and stogy boots.

He was at the same time smoking a short-stemmed clay pipe, "pushing" the horse with the lines to accelerate its speed, and humming a quaint old Methodist hymn, and appeared to have no other thoughts, until—

The steed suddenly settled back in the breeching, causing the wagon to halt abruptly, and the driver beheld a rotund figure standing beside the wagon, with a pair of huge revolvers in his grasp.

And this road-agent knight, who had so unceremoniously swooped down upon the lone

voyageur, was no less a person than Hans, the Jezebel's servant!

Not alone was the Dutchman, for at the horse's head stood the fat negress, whom we have mentioned in another chapter, her eyes rolling comically, and her whole weight braced against the horse, to keep him from escaping.

"Surrender! You vas my brisoner mit war!" Hans cried, in a deep basso voice. "Stir but so mooch as a viggie mit your hair, und I vill plow you to dunder!"

"Hello! whatin thunder d'ye want, pilgrim?" the driver demanded. "I ain't no stage-coach, ner ain't got nuthin' in the way o' vallybles, 'cept a jack-knife and a plug of terbacker."

"That's a lie. I know better ash dot," Hans replied. "Off you dink you can pull wool ofer mit our eyes, you makes a pig mistake. Ve pe der boss off dis trail, und you pet we're quite flip! I am Bleedy Ben, an' my companion, she is Butcher-knife Belle, und ve yocst kill you quicker ash dunder off you don't deliver up dot package vot you've got mit der hind end off your ominousbus—von't ve, Butcher-knife?"

"Yas, we will, fo' suah, sah!" the colored road-agentess declared.

"What package? I have no package," the stranger said, with visible uneasiness. "I don't understand."

"Dot is a lie, swi dimes!" Hans asseverated. "You see, old schap, ve was dead right on dot leetle game, und our eyes don't close up worth a cent. You vas got a package mit your wagon, directed to Madame Cheviot, und dot package contains counderfoot mooney, too. Now, off you know ven your scallub ish worth ein cent a pound, you'll jest shump oud of dot wagon, an' skip—waltz—skedaddle. Off you don't, vedakes you to Placerville, before an investigation gommitty, an' unless you vos can eggsplain how you cum by dot money, you gets presented mit a piccadilly collar, free vidout sharge."

"You bet! I twig! I git! Ta! ta!" the owner of the illicit stage replied, leaping from the wagon. "Much obleeged to ye fer lettin' me off, 'ca'se I didn't know w'at war in the bundle. Oh! this wicked, wicked world!"

And he hurried away, rapidly.

CHAPTER XI.

CLOSING IN TOWARD A CRISIS.

THAT same evening had another incident connected with our story, worth while to chronicle.

Though no city, or half of one, for that matter, Placerville boasted of many metropolitan advantages, among which was its daily newspaper, called the *Budget*, which was edited and published by a superannuated little mortal, named Scram, and devoted to local news and correspondence from neighboring towns.

Scram, with his pinched visage, green goggles, and frightful famine of flesh upon his bones, was not the most prepossessing looking person in the world to look at, and it had been hinted that he was not the man apt to look the second time at a dollar in deliberation as to how was the best way and the most honest way to gather it in to his coffers.

Nor was the genial Scram—Antonio Adolphus—said to have any over great compunctions about the truthfulness of articles published in his paper, so long as they were readably sensational, and helped to fill up, and save "padding."

In consequence many little items found their way into the *Budget* that were none too truthful and yet which the patrons of the paper digested as veritable fact.

This selfsame Sunday evening that Hans Schwartzheimer played up road-agent, Antonio Adolphus Scram was seated in his office, scissoring news items for his next day's issue when there came a knock at the door, and a dirtily dressed miner, with a long beard, and a pick on his shoulder, entered.

"Ah! Good-evening!" cried Scram. "Happy to see you! Be seated. What's the news?"

"News! lordy mighty! *sech* news!" the miner gasped, seating himself. "Be you ther newspaper chap?"

"I have that honor," Antonio replied, with serene complacency.

"And my name's Pete Dinkelpop, from Chico," the stranger volunteered. "Ye've got a reporter up in Chico, ain't ye, mister?"

"Ah! yes—very attentive fellow—a most exemplary representative of my paper, is Mr. Hook."

"Yas. Well, ye see he got on a b'ilin' drunk, last night, an' not feelin' good, ter-day, axed me ter come down an' give ye sum p'int's o' news. Ye see, thar's a sensation up thar, this mornin'. A leetle dwarf kim inter town, got b'ilin' full o' 'forty-rod,' an' then sed that he was tired o' livin', thet his name was Girard

Athol; an' then he tuk out a knife an' cut his throat from ear to ear. Jest as he was passin' off this coil, a young gal rushed up, called him "husband," an' then she popped herself over wi' a six, an' thar was two corpses. So we jest chucked 'em in a prospect-hole, sed a doxology over 'em, an' I come down ter report. So ef ye kin make an item of et, mebbe folks 'll think Chico is gittin' ter be a red-hot place, an' popylation 'll drift that way. Ye might say, tew, thet we're goin' ter hev a dance-house started thar, soon, an' et'll cost only six bits fer supper, dance, bug-juice and cigars; dog cheap, you bet!"

"Of course I shall be happy to put the matter in print," Mr. Scram said, and then his reporter took leave.

In the *Budget* of the next morning was a full-column account of the double suicide at Chico, a little camp some twenty miles from Placerville, and Antonio wound up the brilliant effort, with the following:

"It was this same couple that created such a disturbance at the Darrel-Cheviot wedding, a few days ago, and caused the ceremony to be indefinitely postponed. There can no longer be a doubt that the explanation of Madame Cheviot was truthful, and we hope to soon have the pleasure of reporting the consummation of the ceremony that was then so abruptly interrupted."

George Darrel, the bonanza king, was among the first to peruse this, on the following morning, and he read it over and over again, several times, carefully.

"Perhaps I have been unjust to her," he said, "but I believed at the time that the dwarf was really her husband. At all events, the two are now dead, and nothing is to hinder me from marrying the madame, and uniting our two fortunes. She is not a long-lived woman, while I am robust and of a centenarian race, and bid fair to some day own all. Besides, I shall in marrying her gain control of all, now."

He accordingly soon after called upon the madame, and showed her the account in the paper.

She read it, the expression of her countenance undergoing but little change.

"It is better so," she said, sadly. "My poor brother was of no good to himself or any one else, and I presume his companion, of whom I know nothing, was the same. You are satisfied by this, then, that I am worthy of you?"

"Of course, my dearest, and I beg that you will name an early day for our union."

"Then let it be to-morrow, just before the trial of the man Harris, whom I must unfortunately bear witness against. We will be quietly married, here in my parlor, at nine o'clock. His trial, I understand, will not commence until then."

And so it was arranged to have the rites performed, without the knowledge of outside parties.

The night prior to the day of Deadwood Dick's approaching trial, passed drearily to the prisoner, for, being alone and with no one to whom he could appeal, he had no company but his thoughts.

And he had thought and thought so much that he was heartily tired of thinking. He only wished for something exciting or surprising to occur, to break the depressing monotony.

It came just as dawn was beginning to break, in the shape of a wild, distorted face, peering through the grating over the door of his cell—the face of Old Scavenger, the dwarf!

Harris started violently as he saw the not-to-be-forgotten visage. The hair that covered the face was matted in blood, the eyes gleamed with wild ferocity, the fang-like teeth showed terribly.

"Ha! ha! you start at sight of me, as well you may!" the dwarf cried, fiercely. "You are a wretch—a devil! Where is Kentucky Kit—where is my child?"

"I do not know. I left her safe in the care of Raymond, the banker, when I was arrested, but have since learned that she has disappeared," Dick replied, anxiously.

"Bah! you know where she is. You have had her hidden away from me!" Scavenger hissed, tearing at the bars, as if he longed to get in. "You are a demon to do this. Again I demand, where is my child? You know—you have her—tell me, or I'll tear your heart out!"

"Again I repeat I do not know where she is," the prisoner replied.

"Ha! ha! we shall see. If you are lying to me—if you have dared to harm one hair of that pure child's head, I'll tear you limb from limb."

With demoniac laughter, the face disappeared from the window.

"He has gone stark mad, and if he fails to find the girl, there will be bad work," Dick muttered, gloomily. "I hope he will get over the notion that I know anything of her whereabouts."

In the darkest hour before the dawn of that same morning, a wild-eyed, haggard being, with disheveled hair and torn clothing, gained entrance to the Cheviot mansion by aid of a skeleton key, and, shortly after, with cat-like movements, stood in Madame Cheviot's sleeping apartment.

The dim lamplight revealed the once pretty face of Milly Raymond, but now terribly changed from suffering. The light of insanity burned in the sunken eyes, and the crafty cunning of a maniac was in the expression of the pallid face.

For some time she searched noiselessly about the room; then she shook her clinched hand on high, and departed.

Half an hour later two figures left the mansion and hastened like shadows down the deserted street; and out of the town into the dark, gloomy gulch beyond.

One of these persons was Millicent Raymond—the other was Kitty Athol, going to—her death!

Bright and clear dawned the morning of Deadwood Dick's trial, as if to cheer him to meet those bravely who were to judge him.

But for him the morning's brightness had no comfort; he was quietly resigned to the test of standing his trial, and receiving such sentence as should be passed on him.

And he had little doubt but what the result would be against him, and that the sentence would be death.

About an hour before the trial was to take place, a party, composed of Madame Cheviot, and her intended husband, her daughter, Ralph Randall, and the minister, assembled in the madame's parlor, where the previously interrupted nuptials were to be consummated.

The couples assumed their respective positions, and the minister was about to begin, when there came a loud knock at the front door.

"Good heavens, what now?" was the Jezebel's thought, but it did not find expression in words. "Will you please go and see what is wanted, Randall?" she asked. "My servant is not in the house."

Randall assented, and leaving the parlor, closed the door after him, after which he made his way to the hall door, and opened it.

The two roughs, Black Bob and Bloody Bill stood on the steps, outside.

"What d'ye want?" Randall demanded, gruffly, although being in all the madame's secrets, he could well guess the nature of the bullwhackers' errand.

"We want ter see the mum," Bloody Bill growled. "Ef you're her lackey, jest tell her thet B. B. and B. B. await, outside."

"Madame Cheviot is engaged, and you cannot obtain an interview with her, to-day, so be off with you."

"Waal, now, my heyes, what imperdence! Did ther old gal give ye them orders, my gay an' festive super? Ef she did, I allow she orter 'a' knowed better. We two black an' bloody sons o' royal parentage ken't be put down in thet style—oh, no! We got wind thet the madum was er-go'in' tew take to herself a husband, an' we thort as how et would be ther proper caper fer us to come over an' give the bride away!"

"Impossible, sir. I must positively refuse to admit you. If you will call another day she will perhaps be able to give you audience."

"But, see hyar, young fellar, thet ain't our lay-out, ner we ain't ter be bluffed. We want ther madame, or her money—a straight thousand dollars. Ef she don't send out the cash in the simplified jerk of a lamb's tail, we'll make things howl—an' don't ye fergit it. Ef she don't pan out, we'll give her away, in a way she won't relish."

Randall saw that something was brewing extremely bad for the interests of his client, and knew that it was necessary to do handsomely by these human leeches, to save trouble. Therefore he said:

"Well, wait here a moment, and I will see what I can do for you," and then he hurried to the parlor.

"What is the matter?" Madame Cheviot asked, anxiously. "Who is at the door?"

"Two rough customers, who claim that you are indebted to them to the extent of a thousand dollars, and insist on having their pay at once."

"Oh, yes. I purchased a tract of land of them, yesterday, and promised to settle with them, to-day. You will find the amount in a roll, upon my dressing-bureau. Please get it and give it to them, for me," the madame said, thus adroitly warding off suspicion, with a clever lie.

Randall hastened to obey, and soon after returned to the parlor.

"Now let the ceremony be performed, hoping there will be no further interruption," Mr. Darrel commanded.

And accordingly the minister read the marriage service, and George Darrel and Madame Cheviot were made man and wife.

After receiving the congratulations of those present, the bonanza king took an elegant diamond-set locket from his pocket, with a golden chain attached. It was a beautiful and costly affair, and as he placed it about the bride's neck, he said:

"This I present to you, my lady Darrel, with the prayer that it may bring you long life, prosperity and happiness."

"You are very good, dear husband," the bride replied, "and I cannot receive the present without giving one in return. Ah! there is Hans's footstep in the hall, now. Please call him, Randall."

Randall obeyed, and the clumsy Dutchman entered the parlor.

"Hans," the new Mrs. Darrel said, "I want you and Mr. Randall to go into the garret and bring down one of two large wooden chests you will find stored there. Be sure and bring the chest which stands on the right-hand side of the stairway, as you go up."

"Yaw, ve fetch 'im," Hans replied. "Coom along, Misder Randall."

They were gone about ten minutes, when they returned, carrying a large red chest between them, which they deposited upon the floor.

"Are you sure you brought the right one?" the madame asked, anxiously.

"According to your directions we brought the chest standing on the right-hand side of the stairs, as we went up," Randall replied, bowing.

"Then it is all right," the bride said, with evident relief. She then turned to Darrel, and handed him a bunch of keys.

"There, dear husband, is a bunch of keys, one of which will unlock that chest, which contains the present I would give you. Unlock it, raise the lid, and tell me what you think of it."

"I will do so, expecting to find it full of gold," Darrel said, laughingly.

"And you will have your expectations gratified, I expect," Randall said.

Kneeling, the bonanza king fitted a key to the lock, turned it, and raised the lid!

Then came a cry of surprise—of horror and consternation, and every one leaped back a pace!

What a wedding gift was this!

Even the madame covered her face with her hands, and staggered back as though shot!

For there in the bottom of the chest, in a cramped position, was the skeleton of a human being—of a man! It had lain there for several years, evidently, for what flesh had not decomposed had dried tight to the bones; the grinning skull, too had lost its hair, and the sockets were eyeless.

For the space of a minute George Darrel gazed at the appalling spectacle; then, mastering the horror that had seized him, he turned to his bride, sternly.

"Woman, what does this mean?" was all he said, but there was an awful something in the way it was asked.

"Do not ask her, for this mistake has quite overcome her. Instead, let me explain," Randall said. "This skeleton is the remains of Madame Cheviot's first husband, who was, unluckily, a notorious outlaw and desperado. Madame never lived with him after she learned his true character, but when, wounded and dying, he came to her and begged her to keep him from being lynched by the officers of the law, her heart went out in pity for him, and she promised to hide him; so she placed him in this chest, and left the lid a trifle raised, so that he could breathe. When the danger had partly blown over, she went to carry him food, but found that he had in some way jarred the wedge from under the lid, and it had closed down tightly. Having a spring-lock, he could not raise the lid, and he had smothered. Her house being watched for weeks—ay, months, the madame could not dispose of the body, and had to leave it in its tomb, in the garret. There it has remained ever since, because of her natural dread of an attempt to make away with it. In

some unaccountable way, the boxes have changed places, and created this scene, of which my lady is innocent, I assure you."

Darrel heard him through with a cold, stern expression of countenance, after which he spoke:

"Your story I can not credit!" he said, emphatically. "I now believe, as I half suspected at first, that I am the victim of a designing adventuress's schemes. Bring down the other chest. We'll see what is in *that*!"

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION—THE LAST BITE OF A SNAKE.

"YES, bring down the other chest," the madame said, eagerly. "If my gold is not in that, I am lost."

Accordingly, Randall and the Dutchman went up-stairs again, and on their return carried another chest between them, which was an exact duplicate of the first.

"There! open that, and see that I have the gold, and have not been deceiving you!" the bride cried.

"No! you may open it yourself. I am not fond of opening coffins," the speculator retorted. "It is for you to prove your assertion—not I."

Taking the keys from him, the madame stepped toward the chest, but before she could reach it the lid was suddenly thrown up, there was an ear-splitting yell, and Old Scavenger sprang from his hiding-place!

"Ha! ha!" he roared, wildly; "my time has come for vengeance. It is too late for you to repent and mend your ways, for, Jezebel! you shall die, ere you do any further deviltry!"

And as he spoke, he leaped forward, and before any one could hinder him, he plunged a dagger to the hilt in the horror-paralyzed madame's bosom.

Then, with a shout of demoniac laughter, he sprang through a window, and made his escape through the grove.

George Darrel caught madame as she fell, and carried her to a couch, then turned to speak to Randall; but that worthy was not in the room.

The Dutchman, however, approached.

"Is she dead?" he asked, quietly.

"I am afraid so. Bring some water."

He obeyed, and dashed a liberal quantity in her face, but it failed to bring back the spirit of life which had already taken its flight.

"She is already dead," he said, "and it is just as well that she is thus."

"Why?"

"Because it would only have been a matter of time with her, as there are enough crimes against her to hang her higher than Haman!"

"You are not the ignorant Dutchman you appeared, a short time ago."

"No. I am one of these Deputy U. S. Marshal detectives sent here to ferret out who was circulating bogus money, in this vicinity, for a gang of Eastern counterfeiters. I also had papers to serve on the madame for no less than four murders that have been committed by her, in as many years. It was my purpose to arrest her to-day. My name is Scott Davis!"

"What! the noted sleuth of Cheyenne?"

"The same. The other two persons sent on here were Pete McClure, who is made up as a negress, and Deadwood Dick. I did not know his tack, until he was arrested and his deputy's papers taken from him."

The news of Madame Cheviot's murder was all over the town, in less than an hour, but though a crowd gathered before the mansion, the doors opened to no one whom Bonanza Darrel did not see fit to admit.

He on the impulse of the moment, offered a reward of five thousand dollars, for the dwarf's capture, within a week.

This was done more to get rid of the crowd than anything else, for he was well satisfied that the dwarf would never be found.

A large posse of Vigilantes were hastily organized, and a search made, but without satisfactory result. Old Scavenger was not to be found.

Owing to the excitement consequent upon the murder of the Jezebel, the trial of Deadwood Dick had been adjourned to the following day.

Then he was brought forth from his confinement, for trial.

In lieu of a court-house, the wedding platform in the grove was made the scene of the trial, being occupied by the prisoner, and the self-constituted court, which was composed of six jurymen, a judge, and a lawyer for the defense and one for the prosecution. The witnesses in the case were to be picked out of the audience, as they were wanted.

The first charge against the prisoner was that of murder; of witnesses there were two—both rough but honest miners, whose word was unimpeachable.

Their testimony corresponded exactly, and was to the effect that when they were on their way home, late at night, they heard some one ahead of them suddenly start off on a run.

They had given chase until they came to where a man was lying dead, across the walk. Soon after, Madame Cheviot had come up, and she stated that she had just met Deadwood Dick running in great haste toward his shanty.

Deadwood Dick then was sworn, and in a clear and concise way related how he had first discovered the murdered man, and on hearing some one approaching, felt sure were he discovered there he would be accused of the crime, and had deemed it best to take leg bail for security. This concluded the testimony in the murder case, as Madame Cheviot was now dead.

The lawyers then had their say, and the matter was left out to the jury, who at once gave in a verdict of not guilty, and the judge wound up by pronouncing Edward Harris acquitted of the charge of murder.

This, however, was but the first stage of the trial, for Deadwood Dick was to answer to the charge of circulating counterfeit money.

Mr. Wray appeared, first, on the part of the prosecution, and gave testimony of how he had received a thousand dollars in counterfeit money, from Harris, when said Harris was employed as clerk of Mr. Raymond; on discovering the swindle, he had at once repaired to Mr. Raymond, who became somewhat uneasy, and, on examining his safe, found five thousand dollars in good money gone, and the same amount of spurious stuff in its place.

They had at once gone to Harris's house and arrested him, and discovered three packages, containing another thousand of the "queer" in his shanty.

Several others testified to the finding of the money in the shanty; then Deadwood Dick was recalled and sworn.

His explanation was the same he had given Raymond the morning of his arrest; of the money found in his shanty, and that exchanged at the bank, he had nothing to say. He had had no handling of it, nor any knowledge of how it came there.

"Very strange!" the judge commented.

"If there is no evidence in your behalf, I am afraid we shall have to find you guilty."

"But I haff got some effydence!" shouted a voice, and Hans, alias Scott Davis came forward, accompanied by his sable-hued pard, McCune.

He then made a deposition of his genuine character and that of his companion, and made revelations that entirely cleared Harris.

He stated, among other things, how he and McCune had overheard Ralph Randall inveigle Millicent Raymond into a scheme, wherein she was to rob her father's bank of five thousand dollars, and put the same amount of bogus money—which Randall was to furnish—in its place; how Randall had explained to her his trick of hiring a ruffian to deposit a sum of the "queer" with Harris; how he, Randall, intended to make a secret entrance to the Harris shanty and leave packages of "queer" there, so that when the crash came, Harris would be irretrievably caught in the toils.

Still further, how Randall had explained to the girl that he and Madame Cheviot were expecting a valuable package from the East.

This the two detectives had captured.

There were several other things that Davis brought clearly to light, and the upshot of the matter was that Deadwood Dick was discharged and heartily congratulated by the majority of the citizens.

As Ralph Randall had been missing ever since Madame Cheviot's death, and as there was a reward for his capture, dead or alive, Deadwood Dick consented to remain in the vicinity and watch for him, while Davis and McCune worked the other mountain towns.

The Jezebel was buried the next day, and also the skeleton, whom many believed to have been her previous husband, Cheviot, who had strangely disappeared. Her funeral was largely attended, more out of curiosity than anything else, and there were few who gazed upon the cold white face of the superlatively wicked woman who did not wonder what place there would be found for such as she in eternity.

Ralph Randall had taken advantage of the first opportunity after the unearthing of the

skeleton, to make his escape, as he well knew that matters were coming to a focus, and that if he considered the value of his neck anything, it was advisable for him to put it out of the reach of Judge Lynch's noose.

Therefore he took to the mountains, and roamed about in the deepest recesses, depending on his gun as a food-furnisher.

One morning, he approached nearer to the town than he had yet been since turning fugitive, and there discovered, lying dead upon a grassy slope, with a pistol wound in her forehead—Kentucky Kit.

Upon her breast was pinned a paper covered with irregular pencil-writing.

In curiosity, the fugitive knelt and read the words thereon written, which were as follows:

"This is vengeance. She won him from me—she would have taken him from me, and so I killed her, and go hence to kill myself. I am mad—ah! yes, I am aware of that, but the maddest person can have vengeance.

MILLICENT."

"What a chance for my vengeance," Randall mused. "Both the dwarf and Deadwood Dick are abroad. The dwarf may stumble upon this corpse at any moment. Egad! I'll fix it."

He took a note-book and pencil from his pocket, and wrote rapidly, then tearing out the page, pinned it to the dead girl's garments in lieu of Millicent's note, which he put in his pocket. What he had written was simply the brief outpouring of a demon's nature:

"Ha! ha! old humpty-dumpty—how like you this? I've had my revenge; you can have what's left."

"DEADWOOD DICK."

"If the dwarf finds this, he will never rest night or day, until he kills mine enemy;" and the villain laughed wickedly as he turned away.

And Scavenger did find it a day later; buried sweet Kitty in a lone forest grave, and then turned his face to the south-west—an awful face it was, in its set, stern expression—a face whereon was written terrible resolve.

"Vengeance *shall* be mine!" he said.

THE END.

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